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New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann. . . . . (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pham Gia Khiem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

Mr. Pham Gia Khiem (Viet Nam): Allow me first to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I am confident that you will ably guide our session to a great success. I would also like to commend His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim for his important contribution to the work of the Assembly at its sixty-second session.

While the trend of peace, cooperation and development continues to prevail, there have been complex developments in the world over the past year. Local conflicts endure, acts of terrorism still occur in many parts of the world and new tensions have emerged in Europe, including in the Balkans and the Caucasus. At the same time, the world is experiencing the most severe economic uncertainties since the 1997-1998 financial crisis, together with new challenges such as climate change and the food and energy security crises. More than ever, the current situation compels nations to promote dialogue and cooperation to surmount common challenges, both man-made and natural.

Viet Nam supports efforts to end violence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

We should also work to facilitate further progress in the search for lasting peaceful solutions to the nuclear issues on the Korean peninsula and Iran on the basis of due respect both for the legitimate rights of States to develop and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and for the regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

In follow-up to the Annapolis outcome, I wish to reaffirm Viet Nam's support for the role of the Quartet, the League of Arab States, regional countries and the United Nations, especially the Security Council, in the quest for a lasting solution in the Middle East. Such a solution should respect the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent State of their own, and the principle of land for peace.

As leaders of the world gathered here to discuss the development needs of Africa, we were keenly aware of the organic relationship between peace and development. Viet Nam undertakes to work closely with the United Nations and the African Union to find peaceful solutions to the conflicts and disputes that still rage on the continent.

New uncertainties are unfolding in the global economic and financial situation. Climate change and energy and food shortages are becoming more and more serious global issues. In the face of that situation, it is essential to enhance international cooperation to overcome these problems. In that regard, developed

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countries should take measures to maintain their macroeconomic and financial stability and implement international commitments to improve international economic relations and the transfer of technology. Such cooperation is possible and effective only when due regard is given to each country's specific conditions, legitimate concerns and interests.

Given the complex developments in the world, the United Nations has a greater role to play in saving humankind from the scourge of war and in finding solutions to problems. The United Nations must be strengthened to that end. Democratic and comprehensive reform of the United Nations — including the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and the specialized agencies — will make the Organization more effective and efficient in the areas of work mandated by the Charter. Viet Nam will continue to contribute to efforts aimed at making the United Nations more democratic, more effective and more responsive to the needs of the peoples of the world.

In Viet Nam, the Government is working with United Nations agencies and other development partners to implement the One UN initiative. We hope and believe that the experiences of Viet Nam and the United Nations in implementing that pilot reform programme will be useful to other aid recipient countries and to the United Nations reform process overall.

In line with its foreign policy of independence, sovereignty, peace, cooperation and development and its efforts to deeply engage with the world, Viet Nam has seriously observed its commitments and actively participated in addressing global issues. We strongly support the Bali Road Map, which aims to establish the legal framework for international cooperation in addressing climate change beyond 2012. Despite natural disasters and epidemics, Viet Nam is honouring its commitments to maintain the volume of its rice exports at 4 million tons annually. We intend to continue those efforts to ease the pressures caused by the rising price of food and to preserve food security.

The year 2008 marks the first time that Viet Nam has assumed responsibilities as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. In its desire to make greater contributions to the maintenance of international peace and security, Viet Nam has participated in the work of the Council as a constructive and responsible member. We shall continue to uphold the principles enshrined in the Charter while working with other Council members and Members of the United Nations to find solutions that serve the interests of international peace and security and the legitimate interests of all countries and parties concerned.

In the 63 years since its establishment, the United Nations has traversed numerous upheavals of history and acquired an increasingly significant role in international relations. Against that backdrop, and with trust in the power of peoples' will and determination to strive for peace, cooperation and development, we are strongly confident that the international community will overcome new challenges and that the United Nations will continue to live up to the expectations of all the peoples of the world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Puka Temu, Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea.

Mr. Temu (Papua New Guinea): On behalf of my people and the Government of Papua New Guinea, I bring the General Assembly warm greetings and pledge our support to you, Mr. President, as you guide us in our work. We also wish to thank Mr. Kerim, your predecessor, for his strong advocacy during his tenure as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session, especially in the area of climate change. We also support Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations in general, especially its agencies, in the work they do to enhance our development aspirations in Papua New Guinea. As we have always done, my Government continues to support the United Nations.

The United Nations currently provides the world forum for Member States to address the many global issues we face together. United Nations reforms need to be carried out in all the relevant areas of the system. We need to address the international gender architecture to make it more robust, responsive and effective. It has to be part of the core reform process to cater for women, youth and children. We must also be vigilant against terrorism and threats to international peace and security. The One UN system needs to be translated more meaningfully in order to effectively enhance each Member State's development priorities.

We support the call for the reform of the Security Council in both the permanent and non-permanent

categories of membership. A number of emerging developing countries need to be accorded permanent status on the Council to better reflect today's circumstances. We therefore welcome the recent consensus to initiate the intergovernmental negotiating process to properly address the long-standing but critical issue of United Nations reform.

We live in a world that provides us many opportunities, as well as formidable development challenges. The challenges include addressing the destructive effects of the illicit use of small arms and light weapons and the need to address globalization and food and energy security, which lead into the wider issue of human security.

Additionally, the adverse impacts of climate change and global warming continue to threaten the existence of many small island States, especially due to rising sea levels. For many small island States, sea level rise and the adverse impacts of climate change are security issues threatening their very survival. We therefore call upon the international community to act urgently in order to ensure the security and welfare of small island developing States.

As a thriving democracy in the Pacific, Papua New Guinea desires to see our friends and neighbours in the Pacific and beyond enjoy freedom and prosperity. In that regard, and consistent with the decision of the leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum, Papua New Guinea strongly encourages Fiji to restore parliamentary democracy by preparing for elections and holding them in 2009. However, Fiji must be supported throughout, and not isolated in its efforts to address its specific national circumstances.

On other regional issues, Papua New Guinea commends the work done so far on the Pacific Plan for Strengthening Regional Cooperation and Integration, which we believe may catalyse our region's development. It is Papua New Guinea's strong view that Member States from the Pacific region should be categorized separately by the United Nations in terms of aggregated data and in the area of social and economic classification. While Papua New Guinea is ready, we can support Vanuatu's call for an extension to the May 2009 deadline for submissions on an extended continental shelf.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide us with one of the greatest opportunities to leverage our development process. For that reason, we commend the Secretary-General for convening the high-level meeting on the MDGs during the present session of the General Assembly. However, for the MDGs to be effectively implemented, they must be addressed consistent with national circumstances and with host-country leadership. Further, for the MDGs to be effective over the long term, developing countries must take ownership of the Goals.

At the midway point of MDG implementation, for Papua New Guinea, we believe there is cause for cautious optimism. Papua New Guinea celebrated 33 years of unbroken constitutional democracy on 16 September this year. Due to the political stability achieved by my Government, we can now afford to plan long-term for our own development. We have had steady economic growth in the last five years, due to prudent economic management that has resulted in five successive budget surpluses.

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals remains an integral development priority for my Government. We have set ourselves 15 national targets and 67 indicators, which have been integrated into our medium-term development strategy and sectoral plans.

For example, Papua New Guinea recognizes that education is a prerequisite for the betterment of our people's lives. That is entrenched in our constitution and prioritized under a 10-year national education plan. The current one-laptop-per-child pilot project will make learning accessible, enjoyable and fruitful for our children, while bridging the digital divide. We are looking to expand the project nationwide during the Africa Caribbean Pacific-European Union Joint Parliamentary Assembly, to be held in Papua New Guinea in November. In partnership with UNICEF, we have also introduced proactive programmes aimed at accelerating the girl-child's access to education.

In the area of health, there remain major challenges, such as maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS, which the Government is now addressing through the 10-year national health plan. We have also recorded some positive results in other major health indicators, including a decrease in malaria incidence and in malaria-related deaths, and the stabilization and decline of infant and child mortality.

Ultimately, reducing poverty, expanding access to education and health and empowering women through economic and social participation are what we in my Government are addressing.

Millennium Development Goal 8 makes reference to partnerships. We strongly believe that Goal is critical to the achievement of the other seven. We believe, however, that all partnerships must be underpinned by mutual respect among the partners. For that reason, let me highlight some key partnerships. Our partnerships with Australia, New Zealand, the European Union, Japan, China, Italy, Austria and many non-governmental organizations continue to contribute strongly to Papua New Guinea's development. We also partner with the Coral Triangle Initiative on coral reefs, fisheries and food security, and the Forest-11 Group, launched last year by His Excellency the President of Indonesia. Another important partnership is with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, facilitated by the Clinton Foundation, in the area of HIV/AIDS and the provision of antiretrovirals.

To succeed, we must significantly scale up our partnerships. Often, we all tend to wallow in the negative — environmental degradation, catastrophic climate change, crippling poverty, ineffective governance — rather than leveraging the positive. My Government's vision is to transform those societal challenges into a framework for environmentally and socially sustainable economic growth. It is time to cast off policy chains of the past and create a new paradigm for the future.

Let me be specific. First, we cannot account for the environment as an externality. Our natural environment and its services are not free to society. Once we lose those services, often irreversibly, the costs can be significant.

Secondly, we must create a broad framework for ecosystem service markets. Carbon sequestration must only be the first step, followed by valuations for biodiversity, water purification, rainfall generation, crop pollination and food security.

Thirdly, we must now view our natural environment as an engine for wealth creation. Those valuable ecosystem services must be transformed into lasting wealth that supports the rural communities that have traditionally cared for those assets.

Let me use the issue of reducing deforestation and forest degradation — an issue that our Prime Minister, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare, has championed internationally — as an example. Deforestation is a complex subject, but, put simply, it is driven by the fact that the world values forests more dead than alive. Traditional economic theory, which considers ecosystem services a common good and thus free to all, is primarily responsible for the massive loss of the world's forests.

With those ecosystem services valued at zero, rural communities that depend on and care for forests must make a living in other ways. Keeping the land forested means sacrificing the opportunities to be gained by converting it to other uses, such as producing commodities such as timber, palm oil, coffee and cocoa. The international commodity markets, in fact, have hardly changed from colonial times.

In many ways, those two economic relics are increasingly perverse and nonsensical. The environment is devastated, rural communities stay poor and the rich shift the blame. They cite lack of governance and corruption, but those are not drivers of deforestation, but symptoms of obsolete market constructs.

Therefore, global leaders must redraft economic theory and reinvent global markets for a sustainable future. For example, the latest estimate is that approximately $20 billion a year will be needed to halve carbon emissions resulting from deforestation. However, that would be a wise investment, even for that one ecosystem service alone. Forests sequester some 3.3 billion tons of carbon dioxide annually. So, with today's price of more than $30 per ton of carbon dioxide, rural communities are effectively subsidizing the carbon emissions of the rich to the tune of approximately $100 billion per year — more than total annual official development assistance.

Norway has provided great leadership towards that necessary paradigm shift. First, Norway has stood up against global climate change and has targeted the achievement of carbon neutrality by 2030. Norway has also dedicated $2.8 billion to offset emissions reductions resulting from deforestation in developing countries, through the valuation of forest ecosystem services.

Faced by the ravages of climate change on a small island developing State, our Prime Minister, Sir Michael Somare, has charted out his own bold goals: reducing Papua New Guinea's emissions by 50 per cent before 2025 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2050. Sharing a similar vision, the partnership of leadership between Papua New Guinea and Norway may significantly address several of the greatest

challenges of our time: effectively valuing global environmental services, contributing to the mitigation of climate change, conserving global biodiversity and financing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in rural areas.

Finally, our global economy values companies in the billions simply for advertising trinkets on the Internet. Some countries make billions by selling fossil fuels that pollute our atmosphere, others by producing low-cost consumer products that humanity does not require. In fact, Google is worth $150 billion, while the world's last great tropical forests left standing are worth nothing. How can that be right?

Together, we must reconstruct our value frameworks. New environmental markets must support tropical countries striving to achieve sustainable development, by generating billions from rainforest ecosystem services that humanity has so far been exploiting for free.

Several communities in my country have voted to cancel their logging concessions, telling me that the forests and rivers have provided all they needed for thousands of years. In some ways, however, they now feel trapped. The old ways allowed them to survive but did not prepare their children for an increasingly complex future. They now struggle with schools that cannot afford the best teachers and with health centres that provide only basic medicines. Yet those communities still remember how to live sustainably — a skill that many others have forgotten in the rush to get ahead.

But there is hope. Bold leadership is required on both sides of the economic divide to transform the way in which we value our environment and create wealth for rural populations. As leaders, we must understand that, while we may have inherited the Earth from our forefathers, we have in fact borrowed it from our grandchildren and our future generations. Indeed, by learning to save our environment, perhaps we can once again learn how to save ourselves and guarantee a better world for our future generations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. José Antonio García Belaunde, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Peru.

Mr. García Belaunde (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to begin by greeting you, Sir, congratulating you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We are certain that your experience will enable us to have fruitful and constructive exchanges on the urgent challenges currently facing humanity. Thus, we reaffirm our commitment to contributing to the achievement of positive results during this session.

Fighting poverty and creating opportunities to promote social inclusion are priorities of the Government of President Alan García Pérez, and we are therefore pleased that the General Assembly has rightly chosen the theme of poverty — a challenge requiring a global and comprehensive response — as the central focus of discussion for the present session.

Peru has been affected by the negative repercussions of the increase in food and fuel prices, which are felt most intensely by the poorest individuals. In my country, we are working responsibly to find appropriate responses that can sustainably meet the challenge of enhancing food security. At the same time, we are adopting urgent measures to assist those most affected by rising food prices. The direct relationship between poverty and rising food prices should lead us to develop new and more ambitious formulas for international cooperation that are commensurate with the magnitude of the problem and take into account all aspects of poverty in a comprehensive manner.

Against that backdrop, I wish to highlight a new threat to the possibilities of development: a grave international financial crisis whose scale is still unknown. At its roots lies an unfortunate and irresponsible combination of regulatory loopholes, real estate inflation, reckless mortgages and financial leverages without a sound basis in the real economy. This could lead the world into a crisis of confidence and undermine the considerable progress that developing regions have made in their fight against poverty. Given those phenomena, we await decisive responses and actions by the developed countries to support the financial system and avert the great risks of this crisis.

In the case of Peru, I can say that this turbulence will not cause us to abandon our ongoing policies of investing, creating productive jobs, increasing tax revenues and promoting growth. Peru has been very successfully implementing a programme of comprehensive, inclusive and decentralized development based on two pillars: an economic policy

with the clear objectives of growth and job creation, taking advantage of the country's multifaceted potential; and a social policy that honours the commitment to reduce poverty, increase social inclusion and promote equality of opportunity.

That approach has brought into our economy not only financial resources, but also advanced technologies and management capacities that improve and stimulate the competitiveness of our production, thus increasing and diversifying exportation. As a result of that approach, the creation of direct and indirect employment has increased in an unprecedented way in many areas of the country and thousands of small and medium entrepreneurs have been incorporated into the market in an economy that boosts initiative and creative capacity.

Based on those premises, Peru has made steady progress in recent years, with the growth rate reaching 9.1 per cent in 2007 and forecast to reach over 9 per cent this year. There is, further, a major increase in the domestic component, which is a driving force in the economy.

But to those positive macroeconomic figures we should add the important results in the management of the major components of the social model, such as the expanding social, education and health services as well as basic assistance to the poorest. Through the social policy, the Peruvian Government has achieved, in only two years, a remarkable reduction of more than 5 per cent in poverty and almost 3 per cent in extreme poverty. Infant mortality has also fallen by 51.6 per cent and illiteracy levels have also been reduced by 5.7 per cent. We have also established an objective of reducing chronic child malnutrition by 5 per cent by 2011. We are seeking to enhance the management and increase the impact of the social expenditures of the State.

Those achievements ensure that in the case of Peru the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will be met prior to the 2015 deadline in areas such as poverty reduction, nutrition, literacy, health and education, among others. We also see that the role of international cooperation was fundamental in our being able to bring to remote areas social, education and production projects that, in a sustainable manner, raise the standard of living of members of rural communities. The combination of the national effort for inclusion and international cooperation should be maintained in order to achieve, as soon as possible, the full involvement of the Peruvian social fabric in national development.

In recognition of all of those advances, of the economic stability of the country and of the prevailing legal security, three important international risk indicators have given Peru its investment grade. Consistent with this positive evolution of the economic perception of my country, foreign investment increased by more than 23 per cent in 2007 and is expected to further increase this year.

Our growth is also based on expanding the markets, which we have done through regional and bilateral free trade agreements entered into with the United States, Chile, Thailand, Canada and Singapore. We hope to conclude further agreements soon with South Korea and China. We are conducting trade negotiations with the European Union and the Andean countries, a process that we hope will be satisfactorily concluded in 2009. Furthermore, we are ready to engage in negotiations with as many countries as possible, to enable us to boost trade.

There is a broad consensus regarding the shared responsibility of countries of origin and receiving countries in dealing with the phenomenon of migration. Its causes have a global dimension, and so should its treatment. It is a tool of development, both in originating and receiving countries and in the migrant communities themselves. We should look at the central role of migration in terms of creating opportunities for generating wealth and progress, for diversity and for building more tolerant multicultural spaces.

The responsible and constructive handling of international migration should begin with the practical use of international instruments for the protection of migrants. Therefore, the United Nations, together with States, must redouble its efforts to implement measures that will make it possible to ensure respect for the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and their families.

For this reason, in Peru we have been promoting and continue to promote the handling of this matter both in the United Nations and in other forums with a view to establishing mechanisms for exchange of information and specialized knowledge, undertaking standing consultations and forging closer cooperation between the Global Forum for Migration and Development and the United Nations. We must make

civil society aware of the benefits and contributions of migration and continue with dialogue and coordination in multilateral forums, without stopping the progress towards agreements.

The concern about poverty and economic growth requires an examination of the sustainability of development ideas and the most relevant environmental priorities. We need to deal with security and the rational use of water for agriculture and for personal use, deforestation control, soil degradation and environmental pollution, among others. We are working on these issues with the most advanced regulations, a product of our own experience. We have to approach these matters organically. In the case of Peru, we established the Ministry for the Environment a few months ago. We insist that national development programmes take account of the quality of life and the sustainability of land-use models and of natural resources.

Global warming requires us to work intensively with the entire international community to reduce emissions, which are the fundamental reason for the rise in global temperatures and their already visible consequences. Peru is witnessing a rapid retreat of its tropical glaciers, which is threatening the water-supply regime in the most populated and heavily agricultural areas. We want to confirm our conviction on the pressing importance of advancing from the platform adopted in Bali last year with a view to consolidating in Copenhagen in 2009 a comprehensive agreement for the reduction of polluting emissions, in order to avoid the worst natural-catastrophe scenarios for a not-so-distant future.

The current international scene presents a very complicated structure, characterized by contradictory trends of globalization and fragmentation. Indeed, on the one hand, we have global integration of production processes, trade, financial flows and technological revolution, as well as the dissemination of values such as democracy and human rights. But, simultaneously, there is fragmentation because of increasing social inequality, poverty, exclusion, proliferation of civil wars, genocide, terrorism, transnational crime, degradation of the environment and the flouting of international law as a means for the peaceful settlement disputes.

Those contradictory trends between globalization and fragmentation jeopardize the governance of States, the governance of the international system and collective security itself. Peru, true to its traditional constructive approach, considers that the international order should be based on peace, cooperation, multilateralism and, of course, international law. Thus we are of the view that at the present time we need to reaffirm support for the primordial role played by the United Nations in dealing with the major subjects on the international agenda, specifically those connected with international peace and security, the observance of democratic order, sustainable development, the promotion and protection of human rights, and environmental protection.

That approach guided Peruvian participation on the Security Council and has led it to reaffirm its commitment to active participation in peacekeeping operations in the context of respect for the principles of the sovereignty of States and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries. Currently, my country's armed forces are in Haiti, the Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Peru has a contingent in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti and is coordinator of the Group of Friends of Haiti, which is responsible for helping the Security Council in monitoring this case.

Moreover, Peru is an active participant in numerous multilateral mechanisms. This year, we were honoured to host the fifth Summit between the European Union and Latin American and Caribbean heads of State and Government. Next November, we will once again be honoured when we host leaders from the economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum at their sixteenth summit.

As part of our involvement on the international stage, I should also like to point to our contribution to the establishment of the Latin American-Pacific Arc, which aims at harnessing synergies among participating countries in economic and commercial fields, especially as regards promoting investments in the areas of infrastructure and facilitating business, and in promoting cooperation to improve the competitiveness of our economies. All of that is geared towards ensuring a more pronounced and effective presence for our region in the Asia-Pacific region.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate Peru's commitment to continue to support initiatives aimed at promoting an environment conducive to economic and social development, the full validity of democracy, the

strengthening of the rule of law and the promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world. That should take place against an international backdrop where conflicts are brought under control, security prevails and there is unequivocal adherence to the norms of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Those are the central priority goals of our foreign policy and constitute the guidelines that will continue to orient Peru's participation on the international stage, and especially in this body.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt.

Mr. Aboul Gheit (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The sixty-third session of the General Assembly is taking place against the backdrop of various international and regional events and developments that are closely linked to the peace and security of all humankind. Among those are the global food crisis, the increase in energy prices, global warming and climate change and their negative and catastrophic repercussions for the entire world, the global economic downturn that is bordering on being a worldwide recession, the sharp global increase in poverty, our diminishing collective ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the rising rate of infection with HIV, malaria and other deadly diseases, and the fight against terrorism. Egypt believes that all those challenges, as well as others, are high priorities on the international agenda. Their diagnosis and treatment require a concerted international effort. We must all be fully aware that jointly overcoming those problems depends upon our collective diagnosis and our united stand in addressing them.

We need a new approach, vision and methodology to deal with global problems. Unfortunately, the existing frameworks have proven incapable of dealing successfully and effectively with the challenges under consideration. As an example, Egypt believes that the global food and energy crises require serious dialogue between importers and exporters of energy and food. President Mubarak called for such a dialogue at the recent African Union Summit and at the Rome meeting of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The channels currently available for addressing and resolving the problems of food and energy are at odds with each another, to say nothing of the fact that none of them can provide for a genuine and meaningful dialogue between importers and exporters. It was for that reason that President Mubarak was keenly interested in participating effectively in the emergency summit convened by FAO, to which I have referred, on the question of the rising price and availability of foodstuffs.

Along the same lines, President Mubarak has strongly supported the African endeavour to adopt a clear strategy to tackle that phenomenon. In turn, that led to the adoption of the Sharm el-Sheikh declaration at the last African Union Summit, which contains Africa's comprehensive vision for addressing the matter. Egypt has also supported the strategy put forward by the Secretary-General to deal with the issue. We have also called for utilizing that strategy as the basis for more effective international action.

In an effort to translate the growing international concern into an integrated plan of action to address that phenomenon, Chile, Indonesia and Egypt have proposed that that question and its repercussions should be a main theme at this session of the General Assembly. In that connection, I would like to thank the President for his positive response to our initiative and also for including the issue of strengthening international democratic action at the United Nations.

By the same token, urgently establishing collective international political will is necessary to deal with climate change. As one of the countries vulnerable to the repercussions of that phenomenon, Egypt is acutely aware of its gravity. While reiterating our full support for the Bali Plan of Action and Road Map, we call for focused international attention on the issue of categorizing low-lying coastlines, which applies to Egypt. A list of the States most vulnerable to climate change is needed so the United Nations and the international community can provide them with the necessary support as a matter of priority, including technological and financial support.

Based on our belief in globally addressing those urgent economic challenges, Egypt and Norway are facilitating the current negotiations at the United Nations on the final document of the Review Conference on the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development. The goal is to amend the international development agenda for the upcoming stage, while taking into consideration the

agreements reached in all the international meetings and conferences held thus far.

Egypt believes that using language that implies double standards is an affront to human rights. Despite the fact that everyone is adamant in declaring that human rights constitute an indivisible whole, the reality, which we need to change, is that economic, social and cultural rights are not, unfortunately, accorded the same attention as civil and political rights. That adversely affects public perception in many of our societies, in particular those that face dire, and occasionally destructive, economic and living conditions. For such people, talking incessantly about human rights is a luxury they cannot afford, and results in the neglect of their basic requirements for sustenance. The promotion of economic and social rights must therefore be viewed as crucial to strengthening the human rights regime, which is essential to promoting the awareness and practice of the components of that regime.

In that regard, I wish to discuss the important question of using the concept of freedom of expression to incite hatred based on religion. With the utmost respect for the value and importance of freedom of expression, I emphasize that we reject repeated affronts to religions and holy symbols being portrayed as a legitimate exercise of freedom of expression: there are many glaring slogans in whose name crimes have been committed against thousands and millions of people by offending them and their religious beliefs. Egypt calls upon everybody to consider this matter judiciously and objectively with a view to striking the proper balance that protects freedom of expression while respecting the rights and sentiments of all. Egypt will continue to seek such a balance, with the aim of reaching a consensus on the content of draft United Nations resolutions on this matter.

Here, I wish to convey to the Assembly that we are concerned by the unconstructive cultural friction that the world is witnessing, which causes severe divergence in opinion and action; this in turn inflames public emotions and increases the nature and severity of the polarization and confrontation between the followers of different cultures and creeds. This matter must not be ignored.

The international community's approach to disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation is marred by defects, double standards and regression. This is a matter of concern for us. Egypt has always shown great interest in these matters, as best embodied in Egypt's call to rid the Middle East of all weapons of mass destruction. Our interest in this matter is based on our unwavering belief that security and military balance, especially in conflict areas, contributes to laying solid foundations for peace between countries and peoples.

However, achieving genuine peace and security in any region requires, among other things, the establishment of just and parallel international and regional mechanisms in the areas of disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. It is notable that, unfortunately, prominent members of the international community are unduly lax regarding Israel's nuclear capability and the extent to which this constantly threatens the security of the Middle East. This occurs as attempts are being made to enhance the obligations included in international mechanisms without paying attention to the issue of achieving the universality of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and subjecting all nuclear facilities in the Middle East to the comprehensive safeguards system of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Egypt will nonetheless persist in its endeavours, through existing mechanisms and forums and in coordination with friendly States that understand the reality and danger of the situation, in order to change it and to warn of the danger that failing to achieve universality for the NPT in the Middle East would entail.

In my statement today, I have given precedence to international over regional issues. This in no way diminishes the significance of crises, problems and difficulties at the regional level. Rather, it reaffirms the importance that Egypt attaches to the international situation and international problems in general.

At the regional level, as members know, Egypt is persistently involved in painstaking efforts to keep open a window of hope that would allow the Palestinians to achieve their legitimate ambition to gain an independent State on the Palestinian territories occupied on 5 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The current situation, thanks to the efforts of the United States, might suggest to some that there is hope for a real settlement between the Israelis and Palestinians before the end of the year. However, through diligent monitoring of the situation, we

understand that achieving a just and lasting settlement of the conflict — one that provides an opportunity to end Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and to bring about a Palestinian State — requires serious political will on the part of Israel. This must include the dismantlement of settlements in tandem with withdrawal from the land, and the restoration of Palestinian rights.

However, I must admit that we are sceptical about the strength of the will and conviction of Israeli decision makers. Hence the procrastination and setbacks, as well as the hesitation in settling issues. This is what leads to the widely condemned and politically loaded settlement activities, which clearly indicate the regression and weakness of the Israeli side's will for peace. This is also the reason for the prolongation of the conflict, with its consequences that the whole world knows only too well. But we in Egypt will not lose hope; we will continue to work with everyone in order to achieve the objectives of justice, stability and security for the whole region.

The situation in the Sudan also remains disconcerting in the light of ongoing developments. We have observed numerous foreign hands interfering with Sudan's security and stability, as if their objective were to drive that country towards partition. In this context, I would like to affirm that Egypt is working sincerely with all loyal Sudanese parties, at the forefront of them the Sudanese Government, in order to settle existing problems. Allow me to note, in particular, the situation in Darfur, which remains difficult, and the significant Egyptian participation in the United Nations peacekeeping force there, as well as our participation in all dialogue forums that aim to settle the crisis. I should also note our call for an international meeting to address the crisis and to agree on a road map to end it. Stability in the Sudan requires outside parties to refrain from interfering in Sudanese affairs, just as it requires support for the development process in that country. Egypt will continue its diligent efforts to achieve the interests of our brothers in the Sudan as well as the country's and the region's unity and stability.

In our region, the concept of regional security should be construed broadly, and the security of the Arab Gulf — which is currently in the international spotlight — is one of Egypt's principal concerns, not only because of Egypt's close relations with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), but also because of what Egypt represents in terms of strategic depth for its Arab brothers and sisters of the Gulf. Therefore, we follow closely all developments in the region, in particular the recurrent discourse about "new arrangements" there. We affirm that Egypt is working in coordination with members of the GCC with a view to protecting Arab national security and ensuring that any such arrangements — if they come into existence — will represent true security guarantees for all parties.

A great deal of work lies ahead of us at this session. This requires open minds and outstretched hands in order to meet the demands and aspirations of our peoples for freedom, justice, dignity, security and peace. Egypt will work throughout this session to advance the components of our vision for the international and regional situation, which I have just elucidated.

All of us bear the responsibility for this, just as we shall all bear the consequences and the results. We pledge to work with dedication and sincerity for a successful session under your able presidency, Sir.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Moctar Ouane, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Mali.

Mr. Ouane (Mali) (*spoke in French*): It is my great pleasure, Sir, to convey to you the heartfelt congratulations of the delegation of Mali upon your election to the presidency of the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, and to assure you of our full support. I should like also to hail Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his devotion and commitment to our Organization.

The sixty-third session of the General Assembly is opening with the timely theme of the impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger throughout the world. Indeed, it takes place in a difficult international context, one marked by the conjunction of food and energy crises. This situation is of concern to my delegation, as it is a potential source of generalized social and political instability.

What can we do? In Mali, we have granted the highest priority to the fight against poverty and the high cost of living. In this respect, the Government has undertaken a series of measures to stem the effects of the present crisis through, inter alia, a temporary suspension of import duties and taxes on basic foodstuffs, such as rice, wheat flour, oil and milk, as

well as subsidizing gas, hydrocarbons and agricultural inputs.

My country, Mali, is firmly determined to achieve food self-sufficiency and to become, in the medium term, an agricultural Power. To that end, we have made agriculture the principal tool to attain accelerated growth. Accordingly, an agricultural framework law has been adopted, and its progressive implementation has included the following measures.

First and foremost, the new law contains a measure to launch the rice initiative, which was designed as a proactive and structural response to the dizzying increase in price of grain products on global markets. Next, the law includes the setting up of a national agricultural development fund and a fund for emergencies and disasters. It also involves the setting up of land commissions and a programme to develop low-lying lands within the framework of local irrigation works. Finally, it involves the setting up of a high council for agriculture. In addition, we will soon adopt guidelines for the marketing of grain products, including rice, and a mechanism for supplying agricultural inputs.

Along these same lines, the Government of Mali has prepared and implemented a national strategy to fight poverty, a strategic framework for fighting poverty and a strategic framework for growth and poverty reduction for the period 2007-2011.

In addition, our Social and Economic Development Project has been conceived by the President of the Republic, Mr. Amadou Toumani Touré. It should enable Mali to increase its production and fairly share the fruits of growth, invest in the future and build a State of good governance and the rule of law.

The fight against corruption is another aspect of this overall project. The national convention that will be organized to address this issue in October 2008 should enable the Malian nation to seek through broad consultation a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in order to define a plan of action against the scourge.

Mr. Salgueiro (Portugal), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Seeking to promote transparent and effective management of its public finances, Mali, which has joined the African Union's African Peer Review Mechanism, has submitted its governance to that evaluation process. This exercise, which will be concluded in January 2009, will take stock of the situation, including in the field of political governance, business governance and governance of socio-economic development. It will result in recommendations for improvements in those areas.

In the same vein, the human rights situation in Mali has been considered within the framework of the new universal periodic review mechanism set up within the context of the Human Rights Council. From this rostrum, laden as it is with symbolism, I would like to reiterate the commitment of the Government of Mali to take concrete action on the relevant recommendations that we are committed to following at the outcome of this process.

Mali remains convinced that the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts is the best possible guarantee of international peace and security. Backed by that belief, my country firmly made the choice of dialogue aimed at finding a lasting solution to the situation of insecurity that has prevailed in the north-east of our country. In this respect, the Algiers peace agreement of 4 July 2006 remains relevant, as it preserves our territorial integrity and our national unity, by enabling the various strands of the Malian nation to fully participate in the national construction endeavour.

Aware that security in the Sahelo-Saharan region is closely linked to that of States and peoples sharing the space and that conflicts affecting one country can rapidly spread throughout the region, the Government of Mali, in October 2008, will organize in Bamako a conference on peace, security and development in the Sahelo-Saharan region.

The conference will provide a useful opportunity for the States of the region to jointly reaffirm our commitment to turn our shared space into a zone of peace and security, a centre of stability, growth and development. It will also provide us with responses adapted to the problems and challenges we face: insecurity, transborder banditry, terrorism and trafficking of all types, including trafficking in drugs, arms and human beings.

Here, Mali considers that it is the duty of the international community to take vigorous action to maintain and build international peace and security. In this respect, we welcome and encourage progress

achieved in the resolution of conflicts and crises that rack the African continent, including those in Côte d'Ivoire, the Sudan, Somalia and the Great Lakes region.

Mali calls for the resumption of the negotiating process in the Middle East and reaffirms its unswerving support for the creation of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State.

There are many other serious challenges facing the international community to which we will have to respond appropriately to build a better world together. First and foremost, there is the problem of climate change. Today more than ever before, the very survival of our planet is threatened by climate change, which has a serious impact on living conditions in developing countries such as mine through, inter alia, desertification, the silting up of rivers, the deterioration of the environment, a reduction of the length of the winter periods, floods and poor rainfall patterns. We should, therefore, urgently undertake measures which are commensurate with the pressing nature of the problem. In this respect, the conclusions of the high-level event on climate change in 2007 and those of the Bali Climate Change Conference in the same year are still relevant and are worthy of being implemented in a diligent way. Mali, which is a party to the Kyoto Protocol, is eager to make a useful contribution to the fifteenth United Nations Climate Change Conference, to be held in Copenhagen in December 2009.

The second major challenge to which we must devote particular attention is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which poses one of the most serious threats to sustainable development. We must redouble our efforts and our resolve to implement the 2001 Declaration of Commitment, as well as the outcomes of the high-level meetings on AIDS and the seventeenth International AIDS Conference, held in Mexico last August. All of these forums have highlighted the severity of the situation and stressed the urgent need to act and to mobilize resources to fight the pandemic.

The third significant challenge for the international community is the situation of landlocked developing countries, which, as a result of their isolation and their great distance from the world's main markets, are confronted with serious handicaps. I congratulate the Secretary-General for having taken the initiative to convene, following the general debate, a high-level plenary meeting devoted to the midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action. Mali will actively participate in that meeting and will work to ensure that leads to operational conclusions that can contribute to the comprehensive, rapid, and effective implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action.

The fourth challenge is institutional reform of the United Nations. This issue remains important as the continuation of the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council and of the strengthening the Economic and Social Council. Thus, the expansion of the Security Council is clearly a pressing necessity, particularly to redress the historic injustice committed against Africa, namely, that it does not have a permanent seat. That is something which is underscored in the joint African position on the issue.

All these challenges which we currently face require a collective global response. Only a reformed and democratized United Nations may serve as a genuine crucible for universal collective conscience capable of best discharging its primary mission, namely, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war and destruction. Mali will do its full part in this fight.

The Acting President: I now call on Mr. Elmar Maharram oglu Mammadyarov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mr. Mammadyarov (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I have the honour of congratulating His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua on his election to the post of President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish him every success in his endeavours. I would like also to pay tribute to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for his active collaboration with delegations throughout the last session. I wish also to express my profound respect for the able leadership demonstrated by His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in the management of the United Nations.

The effectiveness of the international security system has an impact on the authority of the United Nations. When agreement among Security Council members on approaches to overcoming challenges to world peace seems elusive, the common security and credibility of the United Nations are seriously affected.

We shall respect our shared values and accept the restraints inherent in those values in order to find an approach that is based on a global consensus. The

Security Council must fully realize its primary responsibility for the collective management of threats that transcend national boundaries and have implications for international security. All of us must strictly follow the Charter as a unique instrument of international relations.

The reform of the United Nations and its Security Council will further improve the credibility of the United Nations system. The success of the reforms will depend on our political willingness to deliver the expected results. We need to harmonize diverging views in order to arrive at a generally acceptable solution that will reflect the universal character of the United Nations and adapt it to present-day realities.

We must enhance the role of the General Assembly as the supreme policymaking organ of the United Nations. It is only by strengthening the Assembly's mandate that we can successfully tackle some of the most pressing issues facing humanity.

This session is taking place at a very critical juncture for the South Caucasus region and for the international community as a whole. The worrisome events that took place last month in Georgia have clearly shown that restoring stability to the region requires a collective effort to strengthen the international security system.

Obviously, the situation in that region is a matter of concern for us, and Azerbaijan is already making its contribution to reduce tensions. We firmly believe that issues that cause disagreements in the region must be settled peacefully, through dialogue, on the basis of the norms and principles of international law and mutual respect.

The Georgian case has also proved that the protracted conflicts existing in the area of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUAM), including the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, remain a major source of instability, and a fragile ceasefire regime cannot be a substitute for lasting peace in the region. Persistence of these conflicts endangers international peace and security and prevents the full utilization of the potential of this strategically important region, situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. A resolution of the protracted conflicts in the GUAM area will not only bring immediate benefits to affected countries, but will substantially contribute to stability and regional security.

In that context, the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform initiated by Turkey could serve as a good departure point for building the regional security system. It is of utmost importance to ensure that our common efforts are built on the principles of mutual respect for territorial integrity, recognition of existing borders, equality and good-neighbourliness.

The prerequisite for the establishment of cooperation and good-neighbourly relations in the region is the withdrawal of Armenian troops from the occupied lands and the restoration of the full sovereignty of Azerbaijan over those territories. Only through that can we pave the way for peace and economic prosperity for the entire region.

The earliest possible resolution of the armed conflict in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan remains a primary task for us. The Government of Azerbaijan is committed to a peaceful settlement of the conflict on the basis of the norms and principles of international law, including relevant Security Council resolutions, General Assembly resolutions and documents of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In order to facilitate the negotiation process, Azerbaijan initiated, during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, consideration of the agenda item entitled, "The situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan". The Assembly comprehensively addressed the issue and adopted resolution 62/243. We highly appreciate the principled support of the States members of the General Assembly for that resolution, which reaffirmed the Assembly's continued respect and support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan within its internationally recognized borders and demanded the withdrawal of all Armenian forces from all the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The resolution also reaffirmed "that no State shall recognize as lawful the situation resulting from the occupation of the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan, nor render aid or assistance in maintaining this situation" (*resolution 62/243, para. 5*). It recognized

> "the inalienable right of the population expelled from the occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan to return to their homes, and stresse[d] the necessity of creating appropriate conditions for this return, including the

comprehensive rehabilitation of the conflict-affected territories". (*para. 3*)

The Assembly

"[recognized] the necessity of providing normal, secure and equal conditions of life for Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, which will allow an effective democratic system of self-governance to be built up in this region within the Republic of Azerbaijan". (*para. 4*)

I would like to stress that the principles laid out in the resolution will be used as a basis in the negotiation process. The General Assembly will continue to follow the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan under agenda item 18 of the current session.

In recent years, Azerbaijan has made crucial contributions to strengthening regional stability by promoting security, energy, communications and economic cooperation projects. Production and secure delivery of hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Sea to international markets has been an important element of Azerbaijan's foreign and domestic policy. We will continue to carry out a strategy that will substantially improve energy security and economic prospects in the region and beyond.

Another strategic project under implementation is the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway linking our country with Georgia and Turkey through a major transport connection. This will create an essentially new and effective communication corridor between East and West, between Europe and Asia.

The economic development and growth of Azerbaijan have been on the rise. The growth rate of our gross domestic product remains one of the highest in the world, and reached 18 per cent in the first nine months of 2008. According to the forecasts of international financial institutions, the growth rate will retain its dynamics for the next year.

Azerbaijan is of the view that facilitating trade offers enormous opportunities to pursue development objectives. Against this background, the joint report of the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation, "Doing Business 2009", recognized my country as a top reformer in 2007-2008 in implementing business regulatory reforms, and as one of the leading countries with investment-friendly economies. According to the report, out of 181 countries, Azerbaijan was rated first in improving the commercial environment and encouraging business start-ups. Azerbaijan strongly believes that these factors are central in attracting and mobilizing financial resources to support socio-economic development of the country.

In the meantime, we are champions in the implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and consider the General Assembly's adoption without a vote of resolution 62/274, on the EITI, as a sign of the global recognition of our efforts.

Protection and promotion of human rights is one of the central duties of the international community. Today, this is not merely a question of protecting individuals; it is fundamental to promoting peace and stability around the globe. Azerbaijan remains actively involved in the work of the United Nations human rights bodies. As a member of the Human Rights Council, we attach great importance to the efficient functioning of the Council. It is our common task and responsibility to ensure that that institution lives up to the expectations vested in it and truly becomes an objective, vigorous and credible universal human rights body.

Azerbaijan is fully committed to all its obligations as a State member of various international organizations to promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights. We believe that through consistent reforms and investments in education, we will achieve long-term stability and prosperity in our part of the world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Karel de Gucht, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Belgium.

Mr. de Gucht (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Belgium echoes the congratulations that have been extended to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, and wishes him every success.

During the past year, the international community has faced unprecedented challenges. As we gather here in New York, a major crisis of confidence is shaking the financial markets. This has an impact, of course, on the world economy. The spectre of a global recession has been added to the already onerous challenges that have arisen in recent times, such as the food crisis, the

spike in energy prices, global warming, terrorism and the danger of nuclear proliferation.

In addition, our world is changing and becoming increasingly multipolar. In that regard, 8 August 2008 will remain symbolic: the very day on which China offered us the unique spectacle of the opening of the Olympic Games, Russia and Georgia were colliding in a conflict with harmful repercussions for peace on the European continent. The very foundations of the balance that had existed since the 1990s seemed to be called into question. This uncertain situation has far-reaching consequences for international organizations.

We could imagine that, in the face of these enormous challenges, all the world's countries would come together to combat them jointly. Unfortunately, that is hardly what is happening. Belgium believes that only through close cooperation and enhanced multilateralism will we be able to respond to these challenges. More than ever, whether we like it or not, we are in a situation of mutual dependence. Crises affect all of us, and the actions taken by some have an impact on everybody else. That is particularly true for the current serious financial crisis. If we can stabilize the financial markets in the coming few days through proactive measures, that will benefit not only the major banks and their employees, but also the entrepreneurs, consumers and citizens of the whole world, including those in the least developed countries. Those countries have already been heavily affected by the sharp increase in the prices of agricultural and energy products and are the least equipped to deal with a tightening of credit conditions.

Stabilizing the markets is certainly necessary, but it must not make us lose sight of the lessons to be learned from the crisis and the corresponding medium- and long-term measures to be taken to ensure that the world does not again become victim to financial management that at times is risky and immense speculation with borrowed money.

We are well aware that the crisis goes far beyond the capacity of a single country, however powerful it may be. Better regulation of financial markets and the drawing up of control regulations are essential, in particular with regard to short selling, hedge funds and structured products. That is a task that can be undertaken only at the international level, in close cooperation among the world's economies.

Understand what I am saying: Belgium is convinced of the advantages of globalization and free trade. We must not forget that thanks to that globalization of trade, in recent decades the world has seen remarkable development and that hundreds of millions of men and women have escaped extreme poverty and today have a better daily life, even if the sharing of wealth still remains too unequal.

The developed countries have the duty to spearhead a better organization of the financial world. The European Union has already taken steps in that direction, and we welcome that. However, there remains much to do. Here, I make an appeal that we embark on that task together, with energy and dedication.

The emergence of new economies is an asset for the world. Ever more countries are determined to become players in the international system. They must take their due place, as the French President emphasized last Monday on behalf of the European Union (see A/63/PV.5). It is also in everyone's interest to demonstrate responsibility.

I would like to stress today that the emerging economic Powers, from Brazil to India and from China to South Africa, have, more than we do and more than ever, a need for trade that is both open and fair to continue to develop their economies at the pace they deserve, without however causing imbalance in the pillars of international trade. Here too, we must again find the constructive political will necessary to restart the Doha trade negotiations that unfortunately failed in Geneva last July.

We all must also show ourselves to be responsible players, in order to try and find solutions to the challenges posed by the food crisis and the huge increase in energy prices and to combat the causes and effects of climate change. Those challenges we face, issues that are extremely complex and closely interlinked, are different facets of one and the same question, a question that is at the heart of the concerns of my country: that of sustainable development. None of us can resolve these problems alone. They call for solutions at the world level. It is thus crucial that we successfully conclude in December 2009 the negotiations for a global agreement on climate, as we pledged in Bali.

Nor is it by closing in upon ourselves that we shall reduce the huge inequalities that still characterize

global development. Better distribution of the fruits of economic growth is a world responsibility that concerns us all. The Millennium Development Goals must remain our main guiding principle. The Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, which will take place in Doha at the end of this year, will be an important moment. The developed countries must do more, and I reiterate Belgium's determination to achieve the objective of devoting 0.7 per cent of its gross domestic product to official development assistance by 2010.

However, this is a shared responsibility, which first and foremost falls to the Governments of the countries involved. That is why Belgium will continue to work actively in promoting the concept of good governance.

In that regard, the issue of natural resources is particularly important to me. It is not a matter of calling into question the sovereignty of any country. But sovereignty also carries with it responsibilities — indeed, responsibilities first and foremost. Natural resources may be a driving force of development to draw populations out of poverty if their exploitation is undertaken in a transparent way to benefit the economy of the country. Unfortunately, experience shows that frequently that is not the case and that illegal exploitation often fuels conflict. Therefore, we must work towards achieving greater transparency and fighting illegal exploitation. That is why Belgium organized last year a debate on that subject in the Security Council (see S/PV.5705), and why it would like extensive debate on natural resources during the current session of the General Assembly.

As a member of the Security Council, Belgium has had the opportunity to be at the heart of the international system. That has bolstered our conviction that we can meet those great challenges only through increased international cooperation and has further strengthened our determination to work for effective multilateralism. The key to that effectiveness is not to be sought only in structures and mechanisms. It lies also and above all in our political will to make them work and together to find solutions to our common problems.

Here, I note with regret a certain turning inwards, even a return to sovereignty-based concerns. I want to be clear: I have great respect for the sovereignty of States. That goes without saying. That is one of the fundamental principles upon which our international system is founded. However, being a sovereign State also means that a State must shoulder its responsibilities in the international community, even more so with regard to its own population. Being a sovereign State does not mean that it can neglect the needs of its citizens in terms of development, security, the rule of law and human rights. Sovereignty does not give carte blanche for conduct that is incompatible with the values and commitments to which we have subscribed within the United Nations. Sovereignty must be a force for good, and not an excuse for a State not to meet its responsibilities and to avoid its international and humanitarian obligations. Otherwise, it becomes what I would call souverainism: an abuse of sovereignty behind which to hide and escape its duties.

Too often the argument of respect for sovereignty prevents the international community from acting when the situation in a country is deteriorating before our eyes, resulting in the population suffering and an increase in serious human rights violations. The examples are well known and strike us all. Myanmar, Darfur, Zimbabwe and the eastern Congo all confront us with a responsibility to protect, a responsibility that the international community is called upon to exercise when a sovereign State cannot or, worse, refuses to assume that responsibility. That can be undertaken through humanitarian instruments, the civil administration of crises, peacekeeping or peace-restoration missions, or, earlier on, crisis prevention.

In that context, I wish to speak of combating impunity. Belgium is convinced that there cannot be lasting peace without justice. That principle guides our foreign policy. It is achieved in the first place by bolstering the rule of law and justice at the national level before, during and after a conflict. For the gravest crimes, we actively support the development of international criminal law. This is not the time to let any doubts persist with regard to our active support for the International Criminal Court by putting forward, as some do, other, more regional solutions. That is particularly true now when the Court is preparing its first trial.

Peace and security are the responsibility of the international community as a whole, and it is in that spirit that Belgium approached its mandate in the Security Council, nearly two years ago: seek constantly, in a constructive and non-dogmatic manner,

the best way to move things forward. It is particularly pleased with the progress in crisis management and the extraordinary expansion of peacekeeping operations. From that perspective Belgium calls for a renewal of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a strengthened mandate, which is a key factor in maintaining in the eastern Congo the prospects for settling the crisis and avoiding a Somalian scenario.

Belgium also welcomes efforts of regional organizations and their collaboration with the United Nations. I am thinking, for instance, of the European Union alongside the United Nations in Chad and the Central African Republic.

We need to make further progress with regard to an integrated and comprehensive approach to conflict resolution. The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission is a real step forward in that area. That is why Belgium has assumed the chair of the country-specific configuration on the Central African Republic. Major progress has been made, but much remains to be done, in particular in order to better help countries during that delicate phase when they are emerging from crisis.

We will soon celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That will be the time for us to remember the values that it represents and that we all share, and to which we all subscribed and which we should implement for the benefit of our citizens and for greater well-being throughout the world. It is a responsibility that we must remember, particularly since it seems to be called into question at a time when we are faced with the major challenges that I have just described. Together and on the basis of our shared values, we should assume those responsibilities.

That is the real challenge. It is not through less, but more international cooperation and multilateralism that we will achieve solutions.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Moualem (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to congratulate the President and his friendly country, Nicaragua, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I wish him every success in his mission and express our satisfaction with the message of his introductory remarks at the opening of the general debate. I would also like to thank his predecessor, Srgjan Kerim, for successfully steering the work of the previous session. I extend to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon our best wishes for success in the realization of the purposes and principles of the Charter of our international Organization.

The Middle East region is one of the most volatile regions of the world, and it continues to face mounting challenges. Daunting as those challenges may be, they must not deter us from moving forward towards the light at the end of the tunnel and from seeking better conditions. Syria is an essential part of the solutions sought by the peoples of the region, by virtue of its geographic location and the aspirations of its people.

For that reason, President Bashar Al-Assad took the initiative to convene the Damascus Quartet Summit, attended by President Sarkozy of France, the Emir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, and the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey. All of those States have a stake in the security and stability of the Middle East region. Each and every one has made constructive contributions, despite differing perspectives and positions. The four leaders probed the issue of peace and stability in the Middle East and stressed the need for consultations and coordination and joint pursuit of those objectives. They recognized that inaction, the suffering resulting from the Israeli occupation of Arab territories that has continued since 1967 and disregard for the Palestinian people's rights have driven the people of the region into a state of despair. Under those circumstances, attaining a just and comprehensive peace becomes untenable and the region becomes a fertile ground for anger and turmoil. In the final analysis, that situation does not serve the best interests of the world or of the countries of the region.

By convening the Quartet Summit, Syria stressed that a just and comprehensive peace is its strategic choice and that it is striving to attain it in cooperation with regional and international partners who share its vision. The realization of peace requires all of those who have a direct stake in the matter, or those who have the power or who can influence the outcome, to evince the necessary political will.

Years after the will to build peace lost its priority status in the policies that influence the situation in the region, we were asked to go to Annapolis. We all went to Annapolis, despite the ambiguity of the undertaking. We wonder what Annapolis achieved. Where exactly do we stand? Have the Annapolis promises to establish a Palestinian State before the end of the current year been fulfilled? Has Israel stopped building settlements in the occupied Arab territories?

Despite all that, given that the withdrawal of Israel from our occupied Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 and making peace are Syrian national priorities, and notwithstanding the circumstances to which I just referred, we entered into indirect negotiations with Israel, with commendable mediation by Turkey.

As President Al-Assad said, we wanted the negotiations to establish the grounds and pave the way for direct negotiations that would ultimately be sponsored by many international parties. Peacebuilding requires, however, genuine Israeli will that is capable of accommodating the exigencies of peacemaking. It also requires the American will to include peace in the Middle East on its list of priorities after years of deliberately ignoring and dodging the question, which has exacerbated the situation in the region.

Syria stresses once again its firm and consistent support for the Palestinian people's rights to recover their occupied land and establish their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. Syria underlines the need to restore Palestinian national unity through national dialogue and is working towards that end in its capacity as the current Chair of the Arab Summit.

The Iraqi situation is a matter of prime concern to Syria because Iraq is an Arab fraternal country and because, as a neighbouring country, we are affected by the negative and positive developments there. We have always stressed the need to preserve the unity of the people of Iraq, its territorial integrity, non-interference in its internal affairs and the need to preserve its sovereignty, independence, its Arab and Islamic identity, and to oppose the calls to divide it. We have repeatedly declared that the solution in Iraq begins with national reconciliation built on the principle of respect for the will of all Iraqis. We have reiterated the need for foreign troops to withdraw from Iraq in line with agreements reached with the Iraqi Government. We have always condemned all terrorist acts committed in Iraq, resulting in the deaths of many innocent civilians. We believe that the stability that Iraq longs for requires an Iraqi consensus to overcome the obstacles barring its realization.

It is regrettable that the abnormal circumstances that prevailed in Iraq as a result of the United States invasion in 2003 have prompted a great number of Iraqis to leave their country in pursuit of safety and security. Syria hosts many Iraqi brothers and sisters. Therefore, we are deeply aware of the humanitarian crisis that has forced Iraqis from their country and exacerbated the situation in their country. We hope that an improved security situation will permit all Iraqis to return to Iraq.

We in Syria are pleased that the situation in Lebanon is being resolved after the conclusion of the Doha Agreement, which enabled the Lebanese to elect a consensual President, establish a Government of national unity and initiate a national dialogue. Despite unfounded claims to the contrary, we have consistently supported all measures that could assist the Lebanese in arriving at consensual solutions built on dialogue and the affirmation of national unity. During the recent visit of the Lebanese President Michel Sleiman to Syria, we declared that we had jointly decided to establish diplomatic relations between our two countries with a view to maintaining and supporting mutual, deep and wide-ranging relations and interests between our two fraternal peoples. We also agreed to resume the work of the joint Lebanese-Syrian border demarcation commission in accordance with mechanisms and priorities to be agreed upon by the two parties. The two countries also agreed to entrust to their respective authorities the task of continuing to work together to control their common borders, fight smuggling, undertake the necessary measures to promote trade, create the conditions for economic integration and establish a common economic market.

Syria supports efforts aimed at guaranteeing the Sudan's unity and territorial integrity and promoting peace and stability in that country. In that context, we are completely opposed to the decision of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and call on the Security Council to suspend it with a view to creating favourable conditions for pursuing the initiative endorsed by the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States on 9 August 2008. The initiative called for establishing an Arab ministerial committee under the chairmanship of Qatar and entrusting it with overseeing comprehensive peace talks between the

Government of the Sudan and the armed groups in Darfur. The committee would sponsor those negotiations in cooperation and coordination with the international mediator of the African Union and a United Nations representative. It would also seek to improve the humanitarian situation and to promote development in Darfur.

Syria, a member of the committee, calls on all States concerned and on the international community to support the committee in its efforts to fulfil its mandate. In that regard, Syria welcomes the normalization of relations between the Sudan and Chad as a positive contribution to the solution of the Darfur question.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) guarantees the right of all States to possess nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes. Much has been said about the Iranian nuclear issue, with some advocating a diplomatic solution while others promote the use of force. Meanwhile, Iran has time and again stressed that it is solely dedicated to the peaceful uses of nuclear power. Deep mistrust between Iran and its interlocutors complicates matters and prevents the stakeholders from reaching an understanding. We seek a political understanding of the Iranian nuclear issue. Any other option is not in the interests of any of the stakeholders and will only inflict catastrophic losses on the region and the world.

In that context, and in line with our principled position, we call for declaring the Middle East a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction. Similarly, we recall the draft resolution that Syria submitted to the Security Council on 29 October 2003. At the same time, we stress the need to compel Israel to dismantle the hundreds of nuclear warheads in its possession, to submit its nuclear facilities to the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency and to accede to the NPT.

The crisis that erupted in the Caucasus region was an extremely ominous event. It is impossible to ignore its dimensions and repercussions on international relations. By now, we know who sowed its seeds and are aware of the provocative acts associated with it, prompting Russia to exercise the option it chose. We appreciate Russia's positive response to the efforts of France in its capacity as President of the European Union to arrive at a settlement of the crisis that will guarantee regional stability and spare the world a revival of the international relations that prevailed in the past.

Much has been said about the war on terror. Years after waging that war, some issues still prompt us to ask: Is terrorism less widespread today than it was before? Can we claim to have prevailed over that extremely dangerous phenomenon? Accusing countries of sponsoring terrorism for ulterior political motives is a desperate attempt by those promoting those claims to justify the failure of their approach.

The right approach requires us to address the root causes of terrorism. How can we overcome terrorism if we continue to conflate terrorism with the right of the individual to live on his land, free from occupation or threat of war and aggression? We call upon all States to cooperate in the fight against terrorism. We particularly stress the need to avoid confusing terrorism with fundamental rights, because doing so gives terrorism an opportunity to strike.

Experience demonstrates that unilaterally dictating the world's political agenda is wrong. The wars and the financial and food crises raging throughout the world today require us to work together to address that malfunction by seeking to engage all regional and international stakeholders through active diplomacy and dialogue as the means to settle controversial questions.

Closing the door to dialogue and imposing isolation, unilateral sanctions and diktats have never been successful tools in the exercise of sound international relations. Contrary to claims made from this very rostrum a couple of days ago, all attempts at isolation are doomed to failure. Respect for the principle of democracy in international relations that takes into account the vision and interests of all States, large and small, will contribute to the realization of security and stability in the world and help it solve the problems it faces.

The Charter of our international Organization, in which States of different perspectives and interests enjoy equal membership, has set forth formulas that remain valid and could be used to build a world in which justice reigns supreme, based on mutual understanding — a world free from the threat of terror and in which there is no place for inciting hatred among cultures and religions. Promoting those values, principles and objectives and using them as guidelines for our work will serve the interests of peace and

stability in the world and contribute to the good of humanity at large.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad AlBusaidi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman.

Mr. AlBusaidi (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to convey the regards of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said of Oman, and his best wishes and appreciation for the efforts to make this session a success.

I am quite hopeful that this session will yield a great deal of understanding on various issues of common interest that shall enhance global security and stability in accordance with the aspirations of the people of the world to achieve prosperity and realize the Millennium Development Goals.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to express my appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his commendable efforts to improve the performance of this Organization in the interests of the international community.

In that connection, we would like to emphasize the role of international institutions and the need to support their efforts by intensifying cooperation and coordination with them in order to uphold justice and righteousness and to entrench security, peace and stability throughout the world.

Annual sessions of the General Assembly are important events through which Member States have the opportunity to express their concerns and views. There is no doubt that the efforts to preserve the environment have remained a top international priority, particularly in view of developments in recent years, during which the effects of climate change have been felt across the world.

The international community has made numerous efforts in that respect, the most salient of which includes Agenda 21, adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil, and the Bali Road Map adopted at the 2007 Conference to the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Indonesia. Those efforts are designed to deepen understanding and awareness of climate change and to improve weather forecasting in order to save lives and property, to discourage human practices that are detrimental to the environment and to educate people to live in harmony with it.

More than ever before, however, we are called upon to intensify and double our efforts and joint cooperation in order to deal with such circumstances in a constructive and practical way. We must support purposeful scientific research aimed at finding creative means, policies and plans to guarantee a stable and sustainable environment while taking into account physical evidence related to climatic cycles and environmental change through the ages. We hope that the fourteenth climate change Conference, to be held in Copenhagen next year, will produce practical and useful recommendations that meet our hopes and aspirations.

Economic development and trade among nations have helped build bridges of communication based on mutual benefits and common interests. The current trade system, however, is in dire need of a vision and systems that keep pace with economic transformations and with emerging economic entities in order to maintain the balance of the global economy and to cater to the needs of developing countries.

Large industrial countries need to lift trade restrictions on the exports of developing countries and to share with them modern technologies, effective marketing mechanisms, and educational and scientific frameworks that guarantee meaningful human development everywhere. The World Trade Organization (WTO) should play a more effective role towards the removal of trade restrictions and the application of appropriate policies so as to create a freer trade environment.

While we welcome the invitation by the Director-General of the WTO, Mr. Pascal Lamy, to hold another round of trade negotiations in the context of the Doha Development Agenda, we would like to emphasize that such negotiations should rely on WTO rules that are rooted in equity and justice.

Everyone knows that the Palestinians are suffering the repercussions of tragic human circumstances that have deprived them of their right to a life of dignity. The harsh Israeli policies of closures, the erection of checkpoints and the perpetuation of settlement activities make the daily lives of Palestinians very difficult. Those practices also undermine efforts and initiatives to achieve peace and stability. Indeed, they call into question the credibility

of Israel's desire to seek a real solution to end the conflict.

We urge the international community to step up its efforts to make Israel shoulder its responsibilities, in view of the importance and inevitability of peace as the only option for joint and harmonious coexistence between all peoples of the region. It has become clear that there can be no peace without the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, foremost of which is their right to live safely on their land and in their independent State, side by side with Israel and within internationally recognized boundaries.

Our commitment to peace is strategic and fundamental. Ensuring peace is a collective responsibility of the international community that should be forcefully and selflessly shouldered, regardless of the difficulties encountered. On that basis, the Sultanate of Oman, in the context of its friendly relations and cooperation with many countries, is ever eager to promote long-term relations as a fundamental pillar of joint efforts in support of peace, security, dialogue, mutual understanding and harmony.

The progress made towards Lebanese reconciliation is an achievement that invites optimism. While we praise the efforts made by the State of Qatar and all other Arab States, as well as by the League of Arab States, we call upon all Lebanese parties to implement the Doha Agreement in order to safeguard the higher interests of the brotherly Lebanese people. We also welcome the visit to Syria by Lebanese President Michel Sleiman and its positive outcome, including the agreement to establish diplomatic ties between the two countries.

With regard to the situation in Iraq, we note with satisfaction the relative improvements in the country's security conditions. We hope that the situation will continue to improve until stability prevails throughout Iraq. We also hope for continued efforts by the Iraqi Government and all political forces to reach a comprehensive national understanding that can unite all sectors of Iraqi society and restore harmony and concord to its national and social fabric.

As for the situation in the Sudanese region of Darfur, we welcome the steps being taken by the Sudanese Government, in cooperation with the African Union and the League of Arab States, to establish peace and stability in the region. We therefore call upon the international community to support those efforts in order to help build a national consensus among all brotherly Sudanese citizens.

From this rostrum, we reiterate our call to all Somali parties to cease fighting and to refrain from any actions that could hamper sound diplomatic efforts. We also hope that all parties will abide by the agreement reached in Djibouti on 9 June 2008.

In addition, we call for continued consultations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and other States on the Iranian nuclear issue. We hope that those efforts will result in an agreement that upholds Iran's right to use nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, while eliminating the concerns of a number of States regarding the Iranian nuclear programme.

The Games of the XXIX Olympiad, hosted by the friendly People's Republic of China in Beijing, were unique in terms of their organization, which definitely made that international sports event a great success. The Games have enriched human civilization in all of its beautiful cultural diversity. We wish to take this opportunity to express our best wishes for the next Olympic Games, which will be hosted by the United Kingdom in London in 2012, as well as our hope that they will continue to contribute to human and cultural coexistence among all nations.

The progress that has already been made in the field of collaborative international endeavours encourages us to make further collective efforts to address the challenges facing us and to protect the peoples of the world from their political, economic and social repercussions. We also wish to emphasize the importance of a joint commitment to the establishment of justice and the rule of law. Governments must shoulder their responsibilities in a spirit of positive cooperation, understanding and mutual respect, which are basic principles of international peace and security.

In closing, I wish the President of the General Assembly the best of luck in leading the present session to a successful conclusion. I should like to reaffirm the support of the Sultanate of Oman for efforts to ensure the welfare of all nations and future generations. We hope that all of this will be achieved in an atmosphere of cooperation, harmony and love.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Marat Tazhin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Tazhin (Kazakhstan): First of all, I would like to congratulate the President of the General Assembly on his election to his high office and to express my confidence that, under his able stewardship, the sixty-third session of the General Assembly will be fruitful and successful.

When Christopher Columbus reached the shores of America in 1492, he believed that he had discovered a new route to India. Today we know that, many years before Columbus made that voyage, European explorers had reached Saint Lawrence Bay. Obviously, prior to the so-called discovery of America, developed civilizations had already existed there. At the same time, Columbus did discover America in a certain sense, because it radically altered the understanding of world geography.

It is globalization that is giving us a new vision of the world in the twenty-first century. While offering new opportunities to the world economy and human development, globalization is also triggering a new surge of political and economic competition worldwide.

We can now see clearly that it is imperative to prevent the interests of peoples and countries from being sacrificed for the sake of that competition. Given recent complications and disputes, it is urgent that we preserve the basic principles of international law, including that of territorial integrity. It is crucial that we avoid double standards in the application of that principle.

Despite the efforts being undertaken, the world is not becoming a safer place. We must admit that there is still no international consensus regarding the issues of disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. As everyone knows, history could repeat itself if we do not learn its lessons properly. Therefore, nuclear disarmament and an enhanced non-proliferation regime should become a priority for all, without any conditionalities.

Kazakhstan, a country that voluntarily relinquished the fourth-largest nuclear arsenal in the world, believes that it is absolutely imperative to develop new mechanisms for adapting the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to new realities. We call on Member States to finalize the necessary procedures for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and the strengthening of its verification mechanism. That is precisely the purpose of the integrated on-site inspection field exercise currently being conducted in our country at the former Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground.

The crisis of the non-proliferation regime poses the real threat that nuclear weapons will fall into the hands of terrorists. Kazakhstan is actively participating in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and in that regard hosted this year the Atom anti-terror exercises and an international conference on the physical protection of nuclear material.

The situation in Afghanistan remains a matter of grave concern. In our opinion, the way to normalize the situation is to build up the international community's efforts for the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan. To that end, the Government of my county has adopted a special plan on assistance to Afghanistan.

Kazakhstan is committed to timely and effective achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We have already reached a number of targets in several areas, including poverty reduction, access to education and the empowerment of women. Now we are embarking on the MDG-Plus targets, adapted to our national conditions, in order to set up higher benchmarks and indicators.

Like many other countries, Kazakhstan is deeply concerned about the situation regarding the global food market. We share the view of the majority that an integrated approach is required to overcome the current food crisis.

Today the international community faces the challenge of a global rise in basic food prices. Kazakhstan, as a major producer and exporter of grain crops and flour, is prepared to make a substantial contribution to overcoming the food crisis. As of 1 September 2008, we have lifted our ban on grain exports. That is our contribution to the international community's collective efforts to curb global grain prices.

Because of the critical importance of energy resources, preserving the global energy balance has become a more urgent imperative. Kazakhstan fully understands its ever-increasing role and responsibility as a reliable energy supplier.

Bearing in mind that energy and environmental problems are closely interconnected, I would like to once again draw attention to the initiatives set forth by

the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, from this rostrum a year ago (see A/62/PV.4). They call for adoption of a Eurasian pact on the stability of energy supplies, as well as development of a global energy and environment strategy within the United Nations framework.

Kazakhstan attaches critical importance to problems associated with climate change and sustainable development. To ensure the convergence of the European and Asian processes of transition to sustainable development and their merging into a single Eurasian process, Kazakhstan has put forward an initiative on convening in 2010 a conference of ministers of environment, economy and social welfare of the Asian and Pacific countries and a pan-European conference on the environment for Europe in 2011.

We would like to express our profound appreciation to the entire international community, the United Nations and its agencies and programmes for the support they rendered to our country in mitigating the consequences of environmental disasters in the Aral Sea and Semipalatinsk regions. Calling for continued active international cooperation, we request support for the draft resolutions to be submitted at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly concerning the problems of the Semipalatinsk region and granting the International Fund to Save the Aral Sea observer status at the General Assembly.

The growing number of natural and man-made disasters makes it necessary to intensify international cooperation as the most effective means of responding to emergencies. Kazakhstan supports cooperation in setting up national and regional platforms, exemplified by the Central Asian Disaster Response Coordination Centre.

We strongly believe that the special needs of landlocked countries should be fully taken into account in accordance with decisions and recommendations based on the Almaty Programme of Action. We hope that the forthcoming midterm review of the Programme will result in the adoption of specific decisions on assistance to this group of countries.

Escalation of ethno-territorial conflicts and increased interfaith tensions indicate that we have reached a critical turning point in our common history. Under these circumstances, Kazakhstan has been consistently and proactively pursuing a policy aimed at ensuring inter-ethnic and interfaith accord, as well as preserving political and social stability in our society. Upon the initiative of our head of State, President Nazarbayev, the Kazakh capital, Astana, hosted two Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, in 2003 and 2006. With its next summit meeting to be convened in 2009, this forum has already proved to be an effective international mechanism for promoting peace and tolerance on a global scale.

Kazakhstan is actively involved in the work of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations. Our initiative to declare 2010 the International Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures has been supported by all Member States, as reflected in resolution 62/90. We appeal to all countries and organizations of the United Nations to prepare relevant plans for the attainment of the goals of the International Year, in accordance with the provisions of that resolution.

Taking further practical steps to promote dialogue among civilizations, Kazakhstan has proposed the convening of a ministerial conference to be entitled "Common world: Progress through diversity". Foreign ministers from different regions of the planet have been invited to attend the first meeting of that forum, which is to be held in Astana in October.

As Kazakhstan prepares to assume the duties of Chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2010 and of the Ministerial Conference of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2011, we intend to use this unique opportunity to promote the issues of ensuring greater tolerance and furthering measures by member States against all forms of discrimination as serious items in those organizations.

I would like to conclude my remarks with some ancient oriental wisdom: "Between a man that digs a hole and the man that fills it, there should always be a third man ready to plant a tree". In today's world, the United Nations performs that vital function by fostering dialogue and cooperation among all peoples and all States.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mourad Medelci, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Mr. Medelci (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I also pay well-deserved tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan

Kerim, and thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for the dignified, far-sighted and able manner in which he has carried out his heavy responsibilities since his election.

The central theme of this session and the subjects chosen for two high-level events are a perfect reflection of the international community's current concerns. In recent months, the world has experienced crises that have revealed our collective vulnerability and our inability to confront those crises. As always, since the world order is based on that imbalance, the developing countries in particular pay the highest price by being powerless to meet the challenges that threaten their political stability and social cohesion.

The President returned to the Chair.

In that regard, the consequences of climate change and the food crisis caused by the scarcity and soaring prices of certain basic commodities have plunged millions of people into extreme poverty. International financial and economic institutions, whose mission it is to anticipate crises and alert the international community to their potential risk, must play their proper role by undertaking the needed reforms without requiring developing countries, in particular African countries, to abide by commitments incompatible with their development goals.

We must effectively and resolutely combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We stress once again the importance and urgency of adopting a comprehensive counter-terrorism convention, while avoiding any provisions or stipulations that would prejudice the legitimate struggle of people to reclaim their freedom or of discrediting any particular religious community.

It is indispensable to continue the work of reforming the Organization so that it can become an instrument to promote freedom, democracy, justice, peace, security, development and progress. Such reform will be fruitful and promising only if it includes reform of the Security Council through the equitable expansion of its membership, the democratization of its decision-making processes and the improvement of its working methods.

Algeria's actions in the geographical and political spheres to which it belongs are based on the principles of good-neighbourliness, cooperation and solidarity. In the Arab Maghreb, Algeria is working to ease the difficulties we are experiencing, which have hindered the re-launching of the Arab Maghreb Union, in the conviction that the destiny of our peoples and the requirements of our times demand the advent of a united and prosperous Maghreb. We are, however, keen to ensure that efforts in that regard do not meet with new disappointments, and we therefore think that that re-launching must be undertaken on a sound, solid and lasting basis that takes into account the enlightened self-interest of all the peoples of the region.

Inspired by its faith in that ideal of the Maghreb, Algeria has sincerely supported and will continue to support efforts to find a just, lasting and internationally legitimate solution to the conflict in Western Sahara that will allow the Saharawi people to exercise freely and transparently their inalienable right to self-determination. That is why Algeria believes it vital that the momentum created by the Manhasset process be preserved and encouraged. We cannot overstress the responsibility of all the parties. We have made an urgent appeal to the Secretary-General to participate in actions to remove obstacles to the negotiating process and to bring about conditions that will permit the holding of the fifth round of the process as soon as possible, as required by the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Algeria, for its part, will continue to assume fully the role dictated by its status as a neighbourly country and an observer of the process.

On the Middle East, Algeria is pleased to note the positive developments in Lebanon and encourages all parties to persevere on the path of unity and national reconciliation. It is obvious that the Middle East will know no peace without a settlement of the Palestinian question, which is at the core of the Israeli-Arab conflict. There is no need for me to remind the Assembly that the advent of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East will inevitably require restoring to the Palestinian people their national and historic rights, including their right to an independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, the return of refugees and the restoration of all the other Arab territories occupied by Israel. On that basis, we appeal to the international community to fully shoulder its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people, to support their just cause politically and to step up its humanitarian assistance in order to ease their suffering.

The African continent has been experiencing profound and promising changes. Undeniably, it is in the field of peace that the continent's achievements

have been the most remarkable. Thus, the African Union and other regional organizations have become respected and necessary partners, particularly in preventing and settling African crises. Algeria welcomes these positive trends. We regret, however, that the support and commitment of Africa's partners remain below the agreed objectives, both with respect to restoring peace and to economic and social development programmes.

We believe it is of the greatest importance to refrain from any action likely to thwart current peace efforts or to undermine the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Sudan. We must therefore mobilize the international community to promote the political process, which remains the only way to ensure that the Sudanese people can benefit from the restoration of peace and national reconciliation. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the efforts and proposals of the League of Arab States, the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement, calling on the Security Council to freeze the decision of the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court and to promote and consolidate the dynamics of peace and national reconciliation.

Similarly, with regard to the situation in Zimbabwe, Algeria can only welcome the approach adopted by the African Union and the Southern African Development Community to enable the people of Zimbabwe to overcome their current difficulties.

We are solidly behind Africa's efforts to settle the Somali crisis by means of unreserved support for the political process and the dispatch of a peace mission to help the transitional authorities to restore peace and security in the country.

There is no way to overcome the dangers to peace and harmony in the world other than concerted efforts and consultations on the basis of a renewed equitable and effective multilateral system that places the non-discriminatory fulfilment of human needs and the preservation of human dignity at the heart of its concerns. From that standpoint, the fight against all the ills that afflict large swathes of humankind — whether extreme poverty, endemic disease, environmental problems or clandestine immigration — can be won only if we all, and in particular the developed countries, join our efforts. The two high-level meetings during this session, and others to be held over the next few months will undeniably test our capacity to respond collectively and solidly to the challenges of our time.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain.

Shaikh Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): May I, at the outset, convey my heartfelt congratulations to you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session and assure you of the commitment of the Kingdom of Bahrain and its delegation to working closely with you towards achieving our shared objectives. I have no doubt that your experience and abilities will play a crucial role in ensuring the success of this session. I also want to take this opportunity to thank your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for his leadership of the General Assembly at its previous session and to express our continued and deep appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his ongoing, unflinching dedication and initiative in addressing the many challenges facing the United Nations and the world.

These General Assembly meetings provide a valuable opportunity for all of us in the international community to reflect on the challenges, problems and issues facing us all in order to form a more comprehensive view of the issues, to understand their causes, be it through success or failure, and to work together to develop a shared vision of the future and the tools necessary to achieve our aims and realize our vision.

Today, the international community faces many challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), notably those related to energy, the environment, natural disasters, food shortages, education and the financial crisis that has recently shaken the world. These challenges make achieving the MDGs difficult for many States, to a degree that affects their economic development and increases the rate of poverty in them. We therefore need an urgent and effective response from the international community to deal with those pressing issues in order to achieve the MDGs. Yet, as we review our progress to date, the global effort to achieve the Goals has been uneven, at best, to the point that we are today on the verge of a development emergency.

The Kingdom of Bahrain welcomes the opportunities provided by the high-level event on the MDGs, held on 25 September, and the high-level meeting on Africa's development needs, held on 22 September, to renew the commitments of all States.

In addressing these important issues, we must not lose sight of the impact of disasters, both natural and man-made, in holding back progress towards achieving the MDGs. It is thus imperative that States integrate disaster risk reduction into their development plans. We simply cannot afford to ignore or delay these development issues. Nor can we dismiss them as soft issues, for if action is not taken soon, they will become real threats to global security and prosperity. The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore fully supports the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction and plans to host the launch of the report in May 2009.

As we all know, the issue of climate change is of utmost importance. As the world prepares to meet to negotiate a successor to the Kyoto Protocol by the end of 2009, global demand for energy is rising fast, as populations increase and some developing countries undergo dramatic economic growth. The International Energy Agency predicts that the world's energy needs could increase by 50 per cent by 2030. We therefore look forward to the meeting to be held in Poland later this year in advance of the United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Copenhagen in 2009. We are hopeful that all sides will realize the importance of the climate change issue and will commit themselves to addressing the overriding interests of the future of our planet and of future generations. Our hope is that a comprehensive and effective agreement can be concluded and implemented.

The peaceful use of nuclear energy has become a preferred option for many countries, and here the Kingdom of Bahrain therefore shares the concerns of the international community. Therefore, future agreements on the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes must be made within a strengthened non-proliferation regime, with improved safeguards and an expanded verification mechanism, in order to ensure that our peoples are not put at risk. Indeed, a highlight of the twenty-eighth Supreme Council of the Gulf Cooperation Council, held last December in Doha, was the acknowledgment of the right of countries of the region to seek nuclear expertise and to possess nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, in close cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Given its universal impact and implications, energy and its various sources are in need of a holistic, global approach, yet they are dealt with in a fragmented, piecemeal manner. That unsatisfactory situation leads us to suggest the establishment of a truly comprehensive energy organization. Such an organization would bring a joint international perspective to determining the role and usage of hydrocarbons, nuclear power, new and renewable energy sources, and would introduce innovative solutions to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Such a body could provide accurate assessments of global energy demand and supply and bring energy data under one roof. It would also provide any objective advice that might be required on an optimal energy mix that is both safe and environmentally sound.

Having spoken of energy and climate change issues, I must now turn to the food security crisis, which is a result of high food prices and which in 2007 increased the number of hungry people in the world by about 50 million. We believe that the solution to that crisis lies in working together to implement solutions, such as reducing biofuel production, changing consumption habits and investing in sustainable agricultural methods.

The shock that has recently affected the international financial system has almost resulted in a global economic catastrophe. That shock has revealed the weaknesses and fragility of the current financial system and its propensity for rapid and widespread dislocation. We bear the historic responsibility to establish transparent new regulations based on the interests of all States Members of the United Nations and to prepare a framework that can contain any future financial crisis.

The fact is that multilateral cooperation is fundamental to addressing these challenges, as no country alone can resolve such issues and crises or isolate itself from their consequences. As the Secretary-General said in his opening statement,

(*spoke in English*)

> "Nations can no longer protect their interests or advance the well-being of their peoples without

the partnership of other nations." (*A/63/PV.5, p. 1*).

(*spoke in Arabic*)

The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore supports efforts to reform, renew and reinvigorate the international Organization and its organs to be more responsive to the needs of a new world. We agree with the view of the Secretary-General, set out in his annual report (A/63/1), that we need a stronger, more effective and more modern Organization. We look forward to the structural reform of this international Organization to enable it respond more effectively to the challenges faced by the international community and to increase its capacity to deal with such issues.

We must make every effort to address such shortcomings as threats to the international security system emanating from a wide range of external sources, including extremists, terrorists, drug traffickers, money launderers and intellectual property pirates. We need to develop collective security arrangements that bring together our security efforts while ensuring respect for existing borders between States and avoiding encroachment on their sovereignty.

On the issue of terrorism, we consider terrorism to have many faces — whether in the form of the heinous crime perpetrated in Islamabad a few days ago that led to the deaths of scores of innocent people, or agitation and incitement from afar or a variety of other manifestations. We should be clear and decisive in confronting terrorism in a comprehensive manner so as to defeat it both in the field and ideologically. We believe that the struggle against terrorism is a battle that we should wage, united, if we are to get rid of its evil.

The Middle East faces many acute issues in desperate need of settlement, the most pressing of which is the need for a just, comprehensive, lasting and peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question based on ensuring security for all the peoples of the Middle East region, including Israel. Such a settlement must take place within the framework of international legitimacy and the relevant terms of reference, where the choice will be just peace, as called for in the Arab Peace Initiative.

In that regard, there is also an urgent need for a peaceful settlement on the Syrian track, including withdrawal from the occupied Arab Syrian Golan and the remaining Lebanese territories. It also requires a halt to Israeli incursions into Lebanon, whose stability must be supported. It is also important to have a resolution of the issue of the occupied islands of the United Arab Emirates, either through direct negotiations or by referring the issue to the International Court of Justice. That would be a significant step towards strengthening trust between the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Iran.

The Gulf region, which is an integral part of the world economy, has experienced destructive wars during the past three decades. It will not be able to endure a new war, due to the severe consequences on the world economy. The Kingdom of Bahrain therefore reiterates its call for a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, in order to avoid the scourge of war in the region and to enhance world peace and stability.

Moreover, there is an urgent need to rid the Middle East and the Gulf region of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, while safeguarding the rights of all countries to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy in accordance with the comprehensive safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In order for the Middle East to enjoy stable and lasting peace, it is incumbent upon us to re-evaluate our outlook on the region and to consider the possibility of developing new regional frameworks to address and overcome long-standing challenges. Now is the time, for example, to consider the establishment of an organization that would include all States of the Middle East, without exception, to discuss long-standing issues openly and frankly, in the hope of reaching a stable and durable understanding between all parties. As Arabs, we accept peace as a strategic option. We are committed to international legitimacy, ending old conflicts and hostilities and beginning a new chapter for a historic rapprochement between the peoples of the region that will lead towards a better future characterized by understanding, stability and prosperity.

Developments in the Kingdom of Bahrain in recent years have been characterized by dialogue and understanding, a process inaugurated by our leader, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa, as part of his extensive reform programme that aims at strengthening democracy, political reform and the promotion and protection of human rights. At a time when we will

soon join the United Nations and the international community in commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which laid down the principles and values of freedom and human justice for modern times. Bahrain's election to the Human Rights Council and the adoption at Geneva in June of the report on our first universal periodic review serve to clearly illustrate the international community's recognition of Bahrain's efforts in the area of human rights.

The Kingdom of Bahrain will continue to move forward in that and other fields, for example, by establishing Bahrain's national human rights institution and continuing to make progress in the political, economic and regulatory spheres. The Kingdom of Bahrain will not hesitate to play its role in helping brotherly and friendly States and in sharing its success stories, which have helped provide a better life for our people. In that regard, His Highness Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, in cooperation with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, has sponsored an award called the Shaikh Khalifa bin Salman Al-Khalifa Habitat Award, which honours distinguished research that contributes to alleviating poverty and safeguarding the environment and recognizes the efforts of States to achieve desired economic development. His Highness is expected to present the award this year during the fourth session of the World Urban Forum, which is to be held in Nanjing, in the People's Republic of China.

A key pillar of Bahrain's approach to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) continues to be its investment in modern education that is practical, relevant and of high quality and that instils critical thinking and creativity and encourages innovation and acceptance of the other. In that respect, I want to note that Bahrain has been able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the area of education significantly before the 2015 deadline. We have done so by providing children with free high-quality education and by making basic education for all a fundamental human right.

In conclusion, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the "land of immortality" and proud host of many civilizations, is a country where the concepts of tolerance and coexistence among all segments of society are central. Mosques stand alongside churches and temples of various denominations, and people enjoy freedom and religious tolerance irrespective of their religion or ethnicity. Fraternal values, moderation and the rejection of violence and terrorism are embedded in our culture, auguring a promising new era in the history of humankind.

That is the Kingdom of Bahrain that is committed to participating fully, along with the rest of the international community, in achieving global peace, stability and prosperity and to confronting current and future challenges, for the benefit of our peoples and future generations. That is a task the international community must undertake in a spirit of cooperation and good faith, for when future generations evaluate our actions and hold us to account, they will not forgive our mistakes and miscalculations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Omar A. Touray, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Gambia.

Mr. Touray (Gambia): I bring to everyone here greetings from His Excellency Al Hadji Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, President and head of State of the Republic of the Gambia.

The legitimacy of multilateralism, which lies at the core of the United Nations system, is being increasingly questioned. Yes, with the launching of the former Secretary-General's report "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005), a lot of reforms have taken place and are still taking place. However, the question is, "Is it enough?" One of the unassailable conclusions reached in that report is that "no reform of the United Nations would be complete without reform of the Security Council" (*A/59/2005, para. 169*). We have established a new Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission and have undertaken far-reaching management reforms, yet the reform of the Security Council is still being unnecessarily stalled for no justifiable reason. That delay constitutes a source of frustration for the citizens of this world, who are increasingly questioning the legitimacy of our decisions. The world is watching the unsatisfactory status quo with dismay.

In any event, the aspirations of the African people and their Governments to adequate representation on the Council cannot be ignored because they are legitimate and justified. The suggestion that reforming the Council's working methods alone could constitute sufficient reform is not accurate.

My delegation has taken note of the High-level Panel's report and the Secretary-General's comment on United Nations system-wide coherence, as well as the concept paper on institutional options to strengthen United Nations work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. My delegation aligns itself with the position of the Group of 77 and China on that work in progress.

Our world is also going through a period of crises, ranging from the food crisis and the energy crisis to the collapse of financial markets and the collapse of trade talks. There is no country on Earth that is not affected by those crises. Too many repetitive high-level meetings, too many false promises and unfulfilled commitments continue to characterize our efforts to address the global crises. We in the developing world have received too many prescriptions from the international community and we have fastidiously followed them. The irony, however, remains that our partners are not fulfilling their side of the bargain in the way they should. It is our hope that the upcoming Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, to be held in Doha this November, will result in the reversal of that trend.

We are asked to eliminate subsidies while our partners in the North continue to give huge subsidies to their farmers. We are opening up our markets while they continue to introduce subtle measures including tariff and non-tariff barriers to deny us effective market access. They commit to doubling overseas development assistance, but turn around and withhold the little that trickles in. When it trickles in, it becomes a media event. That is no way to end poverty. That is no way to end the food crisis. That is no way to end the energy crisis. Certainly, that is no way to address climate change, and it is no way to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Allow me to share some thoughts about the global food crisis. When the crisis struck earlier this year, no economy was spared. The food crisis was predictable because the international community over the past decade has neglected agriculture in the developing countries. In most developing countries, agricultural research and training institutions collapsed, largely because of underfunding. Research and development were outsourced to multinational corporations. Most of us in the developing world saw the collapse of our agriculture markets through competition from the heavily subsidized farmers of the developed world. World trade talks keep on failing, to the detriment of poor farmers in rural Africa and elsewhere in the developing world.

Our response to the food crisis followed the usual pattern of convening conferences and meetings and adopting blueprints that merely heal the symptoms. We need more than that. How many times have we met in Rome and elsewhere just to adopt the same commitments that we have already adopted over the years? Our farmers need agricultural inputs, such as machinery and fertilizers, to enhance their production capacity. We all know what is at stake. Let us honour our commitments in order not to repeat the dramatic events that stem from food shortages.

As we address the food crisis, we cannot underestimate the impact of skyrocketing energy costs on the incomes and livelihoods of our populations. Our economies are under enormous stress and our gains in economic growth and development are at risk of being completely eroded. We appreciate the efforts that a number of energy-producing countries are making to ease the impact of the crisis on net importing countries. Our delegation believes, however, that sustained efforts should continue to be made to stabilize the oil market. Beyond tackling the economic crisis that is impacting the world, we should also pay attention to the question of conflict resolution in various conflict areas.

One of the cornerstones of the Gambia's foreign policy is the pursuit of peace and security. As a peace-loving people, it is our constant desire to contribute to the search for lasting peace wherever there is conflict. It is for those reasons that the Gambia actively participates in peace missions and promotes good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation throughout Africa and beyond.

I must register my satisfaction at the peace dividend that is being reaped today across Africa thanks to the commitment of African leaders to finding solutions to African conflicts. We are witnessing the resurgence of hope in Sierra Leone and Liberia after many years of consolidation of peace and security. It is my delegation's fervent hope that the international community will not relent in extending to them all the financial, technical and material support they require to turn their societies around for the better.

The Gambian delegation fully shares the agony of the Somali Government and people over the breakdown of law and order and the internal conflict that continues to plague that country. In that regard, I wish to salute the effort that the Government and the people of Ethiopia, the neighbouring countries and the African Union are making in trying to bring peace and security to Somalia.

It is the strong desire of my delegation to see a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Darfur. As a troop-contributing country to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, we humbly call on all the parties to iron out their differences at the negotiating table. Regarding the threat to indict President Al-Bashir of the Sudan, the Gambia wishes to register its full support for the position taken on the matter by the African Union, the League of Arab States and the Non-Aligned Movement.

The people of the Middle East are tired of living in a theatre of conflict. The Palestinian conflict has lingered for too long and the condition of ordinary Palestinians continues to deteriorate even after numerous accords and promises. General Assembly resolutions, Security Council resolutions and even the recent International Court of Justice advisory opinion on the situation are not being implemented. The Quartet and the international community seem helpless. We must ask ourselves: "How do we respond to the despair and lack of action that seem to characterize the peace agenda of the United Nations in that region? When will the two-State solution be achieved?" Unless we do something to break the logjam in the ongoing negotiations, lasting peace will remain elusive.

Iraq and Afghanistan continue to roil in conflict. The international community must give the Governments of those countries space to make decisions that are in the best interests of their peoples.

Allow me now to address some neglected issues of international justice. My delegation has always addressed the question of Taiwan in this Assembly from the point of view of justice, fairness and equality. Taiwan is a stable and prosperous democracy that is willing and able to take part in the work that the Organization does. How can one justify the exclusion of Taiwan from actively participating in the activities of United Nations agencies? Safeguarding the welfare of the 23 million Taiwanese through their participation should be accepted under the principle of universality. For example, although it has the world's tenth largest shipping capacity, Taiwan does not have access to the International Maritime Organization. That adversely affects the progress of its shipping industry.

Furthermore, as the world's eighth largest economy and twentieth largest foreign investor, Taiwan possesses significant economic strength and continues to share its development experiences with many developing countries through technical and humanitarian assistance. Taiwan is supporting the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals. I therefore strongly believe that we should all agree to let Taiwan participate in the activities of the specialized agencies of the United Nations. That is a modest request that my delegation fervently hopes merits the Assembly's objective consideration.

The perpetuation of the unjust extraterritorial economic embargo against Cuba has never made sense, does not make sense today and has no place in our community of nations. Its sole objective is to inflict unnecessary harm and suffering on a resolute people. The General Assembly's persistent calls for its abolition have only met with indifference. At their hour of need, when hurricanes Ike and Gustav inflicted massive damage on the country, Cuba's humanitarian call for the lifting of the embargo to enable it to purchase necessary humanitarian supplies has met with nothing but a cold response. There is no room for such action in the twenty-first century. The embargo must end.

I would like to address a number of social issues that are very high on the global agenda. In Africa, we are committed to combating the scourges of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other infectious diseases. Over the years, African Governments have committed substantial resources to fighting those diseases. Yet, our health-care delivery systems remain under serious stress because of the flight of trained professionals to more advanced countries. That is considered to be positive migration, but we are being devastated by it. I think some serious dialogue needs to begin between our countries and beneficiary States on how to get fair compensation for such huge losses.

The other side of migration is what some call "illegal" migration, especially from Africa to Europe. It is a question that is tied to the problem of youth

unemployment in our societies and to the broader question of development. Over the years, we have tried to address the migration conundrum at various forums, but we need to come up with solutions that empower young people through job creation, skills and vocational training programmes in order to stem the tide. Governments must manage migration humanely. The human rights and welfare of migrants and their families should be upheld by all societies. My delegation would like to appeal to all Governments to do more to stamp out the increasing rise of intolerance, xenophobia and racism directed against migrants and their families.

Ours is a world of considerable opportunities and challenges. Let us collectively exploit the opportunities offered by our globalized world to tackle the challenges that face humankind. Together, we can do it.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Al Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the United Arab Emirates, I have the pleasure to express to you, Mr. President, and to your friendly country our sincere congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I would also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for successfully guiding the proceedings of the previous session. I should also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his unceasing efforts to strengthen the Organization and re-energize its role in international affairs.

The United Arab Emirates has made major progress in a number of domestic areas. For example, we have increased the representation of women in our executive and legislative bodies, including by expanding their effective participation in the labour market. We are developing national laws on the protection of and respect for human rights and are making significant efforts to improve the welfare of those with special needs. Attempts are also under way to enact legislation to regulate foreign workers in order to ensure their full rights. In keeping with our commitments under relevant bilateral and international agreements, we are also increasing our efforts to combat human trafficking and to provide protection and all the necessary support for its victims.

With regard to the environment, the United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to environmental issues. In cooperation with the Worldwide Fund for Nature, we have launched a number of ambitious strategic programmes, such as the development of Masdar City, which will be the world's first carbon- and waste-free city, completely dependent on renewable and clean technologies such as solar energy, which will be used to generate power and desalinate of water.

Foreign aid has an important place on our national agenda. We have continued to provide various types of financial and humanitarian assistance to many countries to help them to fund their development programmes and infrastructure projects. Directly and through our membership in the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Donor Support Group and our contributions to the specialized agencies and programmes of the United Nations, we are also providing assistance to those who have suffered from wars and natural disasters.

In order to alleviate the suffering of millions of people as a result of rising food prices, my country has dispatched 2 million tons of wheat to Yemen, Syria and Egypt. Also as part of our foreign aid, we have provided additional financial assistance to help several developing countries adjust to the phenomenal increase in their energy costs.

In that regard, we would like to express our concern about the repercussions of the financial crisis in international markets. We reiterate that this matter urgently calls for a joint international mechanism that will contribute to the establishment of strong and transparent rules to regulate international financial markets.

The way in which development has taken place in the United Arab Emirates provides a vivid example of tolerance and coexistence. We hope to enrich and strengthen those values through our educational and cultural programmes, for we strongly believe that interaction between different nations and peoples is both of fundamental importance and an essential prerequisite for the achievement of stability, welfare and prosperity in our region.

The United Arab Emirates therefore attaches great importance to radically restructuring and modernizing our educational system to align it with technological and educational innovations so that it meets the needs and requirements of our development programmes. We also believe that providing education for all is one of the major and significant issues facing us. It is essential that we devote all our resources to it, for in education lies the hope that we can break the evil cycle of poverty and ignorance, which in turn lead to the creation of a fertile environment in which terrorism and extremism can take root and grow.

Iran's ongoing occupation since 1971 of the United Arab Emirates'' three islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb is an issue of central importance to us. From this rostrum, I would like to reiterate our firm position demanding the full restoration of our full sovereignty over the three occupied islands and their territorial waters, airspace, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone. The islands are part and parcel of our national sovereignty. We reiterate that all actions and measures, whether military or administrative, undertaken by Iran since its occupation of the three islands are null and void. Iran's actions have no legal effect. We therefore renew our call to the international community to urge Iran to respond positively to the sincere appeals of the United Arab Emirates, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the League of Arab States by agreeing to resolve the issue through committed and serious direct negotiations or by referring the dispute to the International Court of Justice.

We strongly believe in making the Middle East, including the Arabian Gulf, a zone free from weapons of mass destruction. That would require compelling Israel to comply with United Nations resolutions by bringing its nuclear facilities into compliance with the safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and unconditionally signing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as other countries of the region have done. We also urge the Islamic Republic of Iran to continue its cooperation with the IAEA and the international community in order to dispel fears and suspicions related to the nature and objectives of its nuclear programme. We also call on all other stakeholders to commit themselves to continuing to address that issue through political and diplomatic means in order to avoid escalation and achieve a peaceful solution that can ensure stability and security for the region and its peoples.

Based on our firm belief in the right of countries to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in accordance with the safeguards regime of the IAEA, the United Arab Emirates urges developed nations to support the legitimate needs of developing countries for access to nuclear energy by providing them with the best possible access to the equipment, nuclear materials and technological and scientific know-how related to peaceful purposes. The United Arab Emirates believes that its peaceful nuclear programme provides a practical and responsible example of transparency in meeting our energy needs, while at the same time we pledge not to engage in enrichment or reprocessing, with the support of the organizations and institutions of some friendly countries and under the supervision of the IAEA.

On another front, the United Arab Emirates has continuously spared no effort to support and promote every regional and international effort to help the Government of Iraq and its people. It is our hope that the latest initiatives of the United Arab Emirates, including the write-off of more than $7 billion in debt and interest due and the re-opening of our embassy in Baghdad, will contribute to promoting economic development and strengthening the political process. That will require the renunciation of all communal and sectarian violence and full commitment to the unity, sovereignty and stability of Iraq, the preservation of its Arab identity and the rejection of any attempts to divide or fragment the country.

With regard to the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates has strongly supported the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, including final status negotiations and the outcome of the Annapolis Conference. In that context, we would like to express our concerns about the lack of earnest in Israel's attitude towards those negotiations. We call on the international community, and in particular the Security Council and the members of the Quartet, to press Israel to lift the siege it has imposed on the Palestinian people and to implement international resolutions related to freezing all of its illegal settlement activity, dismantling unlawful settlements and ending its occupation of all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including the holy city of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and some Lebanese territories. Ending the occupation would bring Israel into compliance with relevant international

resolutions, the road map and the Arab peace initiative. It would also ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, as well as Israel's security.

My country has cooperated effectively and consistently with every effort to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including money-laundering. We shall continue to do so in order to rid the world of that scourge and its causes. At the same time, we re-emphasize our support for all activities to promote dialogue among civilizations and enhance the spirit of tolerance among all faiths.

In closing, I would like to stress the need for full compliance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law in meeting the daunting challenges ahead. I hope that this session will produce international consensus on how to address those challenges for the benefit of humankind.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Lazăr Comănescu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Mr. Comănescu (Romania) (*spoke in French*): Romania fully associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union by President Nicolas Sarkozy. I should simply like to make a few remarks with regard to issues of particular interest to my Government. I should like to frame my statement around two words: responsibility and solidarity.

The basic purpose of the high-level meeting that took place on 25 September was to review the progress made in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and evaluate the feasibility of achieving them. It was a matter not of whether they were appropriate or reasonable, which they obviously are, but rather of determining the viability of implementing them in the face of new challenges. The conclusion was that international cooperation and determination could provide a solution, provided that responsibilities were met and solidarity forthcoming. In doing so, we would be making the idea of community concrete.

With regard to climate change, the world energy crisis and food security, I should simply like to say that the vulnerability of nature is inevitably linked to our increased technological capacity to influence the climate — sometimes irreversibly — through the cumulative effects of human activity; hence the moral imperative of responsibility to the future. We cannot separately or individually find solutions to the problems that affect us all, in particular global warming and the energy crisis.

In the face of all those interconnected challenges, it is our responsibility to better equip the United Nations with the necessary means to coordinate effective joint efforts. The revitalization of the General Assembly, system-wide coherence, Security Council reform and, not least, the reform of the Department of Political Affairs are all areas in which we have a responsibility to make significant progress. It is encouraging that there has been an effort to find common denominators in many projects and initiatives.

Any reform of the Security Council must take into account the legitimate aspirations of the regional groups, with the ultimate goal of ensuring a more representative, legitimate, transparent and effective Council.

If we expect results from the United Nations, we must provide it with the appropriate resources. Following the reform of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, it is only logical to strengthen the capacity for analysis, political mediation, foresight and preventive diplomacy of the Department of Political Affairs. My country is ready once again support the initiative for institutional consolidation, in particular as regards a European regional office charged with expanding its reach to the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region.

United Nations regional political offices could also increase their cooperation with regional and subregional organizations, whose resources should be in synergy with those of the global Organization. The cooperation between the United Nations, the African Union and other subregional organizations during the recent crises in the Darfur region of the Sudan, in Kenya and in Zimbabwe are all encouraging examples. We also welcome the ongoing cooperation between the United Nations and the International Organization of la Francophonie.

I should now like to say a few words on democratization. Romania welcomes the substantial expansion and improvement of cooperation in the Conference of New or Restored Democracies, including the unprecedented efforts of Qatar in that regard.

The current challenges should give rise to renewed international cooperation. The network of democratic solidarity that provides support to countries emerging from conflict or from autocratic regimes is founded on a philosophy of freedom that repudiates threats from international terrorism or radicalism, which have developed their own network as a sort of parallel globalization based on fear. However, the international network of cooperation should not have anxiety and fragility as its common denominators, but instead the natural propensity of States and organizations that share the same values, principles and objectives, namely, freedom and respect for the law and the dignity of the human being. Allow me to recall that, on Romania's initiative, in 2000 the General Assembly adopted its comprehensive resolution 55/96, which set out the defining characteristics of democracy.

(*spoke in English*)

Peacekeeping missions remain the backbone of the international role of the United Nations. Post-conflict normalization and rebuilding should be an integral part of the international strategy to deal with potential breaches of peace or the reignition of conflicts. My country acknowledges and praises the endeavours of United Nations personnel in Kenya, Iraq, Myanmar, northern Uganda, Somalia, Cyprus, the Central African Republic and Nepal.

The progress made in Iraq and Afghanistan should trigger renewed solidarity with the peoples of those countries. The efforts of the international community to stabilize and ensure the success of the ongoing deep transformations in Iraq and Afghanistan should be matched by renewed commitment on the part of the Iraqi and Afghan political leadership to reach compromises and comprehensive agreements allowing for political reconciliation and economic development.

Romania remains committed to the democratic future of both countries. Romania was first among the countries that are not members of the Paris Club to agree, in 2005, to the terms of debt relief for Iraq. The NATO summit held this year in Bucharest reconfirmed solidarity and engagement with Afghanistan. Any security agreements to complement or replace the current security arrangements in Iraq have to take into account the need to ensure the protection of United Nations personnel in order that the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Organization's specialized agencies, funds and programmes can properly fulfil their extended mandates in Iraq.

I should now like to say a few words about the Human Rights Council. Romania has encouraging expectations following the start of the activities of the Council's Universal Periodic Review mechanism. Under the Romanian presidency, the Council examined 32 national reports, including my country's own report. The debates generated valuable recommendations and entailed remarkable commitments with regard to the universal application of recognized international standards for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We should not weaken our support for the Human Rights Council or for the Office of the High Commissioner.

The widespread impact of humanitarian crises resulting from conflicts and natural disasters requires, again and again, our solidarity with the people in need. The tragedy of 7 million Sudanese, almost 5 million Palestinian refugees, 5 million Iraqi internally displaced persons and refugees, 3 million Afghan refugees and 1.4 million Congolese and 1 million Somali internally displaced persons should catalyse concrete actions of assistance. The recent Georgian crisis also added to the international statistics on internally displaced persons and refugees. Yet, numbers as such should not obscure in our conscience the terrible individual tragedies implied by these humanitarian catastrophes.

Aware of that plight, Romania is preparing to host a special evacuation transit centre for persons in urgent need of international protection and onward resettlement. The centre would provide temporary shelter for refugees facing immediate danger in their countries of origin, pending final resettlement in third countries.

The appalling humanitarian crises of recent decades should prompt a renewed effort to define ways to prevent and adequately react to such situations and, furthermore, to rebuild for durable conflict resolution. Further efforts should be made to forge a common understanding of the conditions and application of the principle of the responsibility to protect.

Romania resolutely promotes international cooperation in the areas of crime prevention and believes that prosecutorial services represent one of the main pillars of the criminal justice system. My country is preparing to host, in March 2009, the third world

summit of attorneys general, prosecutors general and chief prosecutors. The meeting is to be organized with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and will focus on prosecutorial independence for effectiveness, integrity and public confidence. We look forward to welcoming the international community's representatives in Bucharest next spring.

Allow me now to turn to the issue of protracted conflicts. It has always been striking to hear the recurrent references to frozen conflicts. Let us be honest: no conflict stays frozen indefinitely without consequences. The recent crisis in Georgia proved that the international community cannot hide or shy away from dealing with uncertain situations under the assumption that they will simply disappear eventually. On the contrary, uncertain situations and grey zones gradually produce effects, effect changes in the status quo and can, from apparent tranquillity, spew forth the magma of delayed — and thus amplified — conflicts. A dormant volcano can still be an active one. Unsolved issues carrying latent threats are not socially or politically neutral, since they generate new realities and risks to stability and security.

Deferring the solution of a crisis is not a suitable answer. Only a negotiated formula, with the support of bona fide international and regional mediation and assistance, can provide long-term and enduring solutions. The crisis in South Ossetia, with its reverberations in Abkhazia and the entire State of Georgia and beyond, should focus the attention of the international community on all protracted conflicts in the area, including Transdniestria and Nagorny Karabakh.

We have to have a new energetic and comprehensive approach to the so-called protracted conflicts. It is time to jointly understand the danger and take action. The United Nations and its Security Council should play their parts and accordingly assume their responsibility. Hesitation is not helping. Full observance of all principles and norms of international law, including the territorial integrity of States, is a must for all of us if we want peace, security, stability and prosperity to prevail.

One of the main objectives of the international community should be to consolidate stabilization and a democratic future across the entire Black Sea region. Romania promotes a wide range of cooperation ideas in the Black Sea area. If we take a closer look, we can see a region with a large population, an important hub for energy and transport flows and great economic potential. The United Nations should be there to assist the region, not only in unfreezing conflicts but also in helping coastal countries to cooperate to solve problems related to pollution, illegal migration, organized crime and drug trafficking, so as to project stability and to support development.

I now turn to disarmament, non-proliferation and the fight against terrorism. I should like to underline that responsibility and solidarity are also basic pillars of the international norms in that regard. That leads me to say, as many before me have done, that statements such as the one made a few days ago in the Assembly about Israel are unacceptable.

First, every State has an essential responsibility to effectively and comprehensively implement its commitments by promoting the necessary legal framework and establishing appropriate mechanisms for verification and control.

Secondly, there is a need for solidarity and cooperation at the regional and multilateral levels so that national measures and actions are recognized and implemented. Romania has always demonstrated its interest and readiness to work together with all States members of the international community in that respect. The most recent proof of that is the contribution of my country to the seven-nation initiative on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation launched by Norway in 2005. Concrete examples of our involvement include the international seminar on how the Black Sea region can contribute to improved global security, which was hosted in Bucharest in 2007, and other activities aimed at promoting the objectives of that cross-regional initiative.

(*spoke in French*)

Allow me to conclude by calling for effective multilateralism and the strengthening of the United Nations. After all, some questioned the relevance of the United Nations after the end of the cold war. The Organization has never lacked for criticism or scepticism. We do not believe the issue to be one of trying to regain a sense of lost purpose. The United Nations continues to be the broadest and most inclusive Organization in the world and enjoys a special reputation and legitimacy. The United Nations provides a forum for all Member States — large or

small, rich or poor, developed or developing — to have their voices heard and heeded.

Instead, the question for all Member States is how to make the world Organization and its specialized agencies, funds and programmes more effective, responsible and coherent in the face of new and ongoing challenges. If the moral imperative that should lead us to carry out our responsibilities and demonstrate solidarity in order to advance the cause of humankind is not enough, then what we need is to look towards the pragmatic aspect, namely, the utility and sense implied in the fact that the world's well-being contributes to the well-being of our own countries and citizens.

History is a good teacher, provided we learn from its lessons. History shows us the virtues of joint efforts and the benefits of cooperation. We are still far from the Kantian dream of a stable world order that is democratic and prosperous. But we can move ever closer to it through multilateralism and the strengthening of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Aïchatou Mindaoudou, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and African Integration of the Niger.

Ms. Mindaoudou (Niger) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, Sir, I should like to warmly congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session, which undeniably reflects the high esteem that the international community has for your country of Nicaragua, which is a friend of Niger. Your election is also the well-deserved culmination of an exemplary diplomatic and political career. The length and breadth of your experience makes you the right person to carry out the demanding and noble task entrusted to you. Allow me to assure you of my delegation's commitment to extending to you our constant support during your time in office. Niger is particularly honoured to be working side by side with you as a Vice-President of the Assembly for the sixty-third session.

May I also pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for the exemplary manner in which he led the sixty-second session and, in particular, for having grappled with the burning issues of the day, including the food and energy crises and climate change. With regard to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, I should like to express our full appreciation for the significant progress on fundamental issues made by the Organization under his guidance.

The subject you have chosen, Mr. President, as the central theme of the general debate during this session is highly relevant. For several months and to varying degrees, all members of the international community have been affected by the overall rise in food prices. That crisis has gripped the attention of every international body. Mr. Olivier de Schutter, Special Rapporteur on the right to food, was far-sighted in sounding an alarm during a press conference held here at the United Nations in which he identified the initial structural causes and called for international action. Aware of the urgency of the situation, the Secretary-General set up the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis in order to provide a comprehensive and unified respond, support Governments and peoples affected and adopt a Comprehensive Framework for Action to meet the challenges.

The Government of Niger would like to congratulate the Secretary-General on his initiatives. We would also like to warmly congratulate his Task Force for their work and for taking into consideration the numerous efforts and views on this issue. The challenge now is to implement the recommendations in order to save entire groups of people in the world's most vulnerable countries from the tragedy of hunger.

For its part, Niger has taken major specific measures to address the sharp rise in the cost of basic foodstuffs in order to mitigate the effects on the living conditions of the most vulnerable people.

However, in a country facing the recurrent problem of drought and its consequences for agricultural production, the truth is that only lasting solutions will help us to counter the effects of the phenomenon and to progressively eliminate the uncertainty that characterizes Niger's production system.

The Government of Niger has therefore decided to give priority to the three programmes introduced at the Doha Conference on Consolidating Food Self-sufficiency in Niger, which was held in June 2007. Those programmes are all the more promising given the potential boon to agriculture as a result of the upcoming construction of the Khandaji dam on the Niger River. The Government will develop its

approach on the basis of that project and those programmes so as to provide credible response to meet the food needs of the people of Niger.

The international financial crisis, which is affecting many countries and is today being exacerbated by the globalization of the world in which we live, requires that we harness our efforts and initiatives to find solutions requiring commitment on the part of us all. While rich countries fear the risk of widespread economic recession, the poorest countries fear food insecurity caused by prices they can no longer afford. Paradoxically, when it comes to the financial crisis and the consequences of climate change, it is the poorest countries that always pay most dearly for the turbulence affecting the globalized world. My delegation therefore supports the proposals made by President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, which were previously espoused by President Lula da Silva of Brazil, calling on the international community to deal urgently with the issue.

We also hold out hope that the upcoming Doha Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development will produce results that include safety net measures to protect the poorest countries from external shocks that could compound their vulnerabilities.

Although the food, energy and financial crises are front and centre on the international stage, there are also other challenges facing the international community in the areas of peace, security, development and human rights, among others. We must acknowledge the fact that international peace and security has been as sorely tested by conflicts as by other scourges that are equally devastating to the harmonious development of peoples and countries throughout the world. Those scourges include international terrorism, drug trafficking and the illegal trade in small arms.

Niger is especially concerned about the impact of trafficking in drugs and weapons; and especially mines, throughout the Sahelo-Saharan strip. The actions of certain armed groups are the true cause of the unrest prevailing in the northern part of our territory. Their activities are increasingly being brought under control thanks to steps taken by the relevant institutions of our country. We therefore believe that there is a need for increased willingness and cooperation in this area, similar to that demonstrated in connection with the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy that we adopted in 2006. While we acknowledge that some progress has been made, we must also say that further efforts and commitments are needed from the international community in supporting countries in conflict or emerging from it.

It is important that we support the progress made in countries where, happily, peace is becoming more entrenched, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau and the Central African Republic, which was recently inscribed on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission. We welcome in particular the resumption of the national peace and reconciliation process in Côte d'Ivoire following the invaluable impetus provided by the Ouagadougou Agreement in 2007. In that regard, my country congratulates and encourages all Ivorian politicians on their commitment to peace. We hope that, with the support of their partners, whose invaluable contributions my delegation also commends, the national peace and reconciliation process will culminate in the holding of the upcoming presidential elections.

We also welcome the resumption of the Manhasset cycle of negotiations as a useful and necessary step in the search for a mutually acceptable and lasting solution to the issue of Western Sahara.

With regard to the Great Lakes region, my delegation welcomes the entry into force, on 21 June 2008, on the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region. We believe that this instrument will enable States parties to address the underlying causes of conflict and to address the challenges they face in the areas of security, governance and development. We also believe that the Pact is part and parcel of the new vision for the settlement of conflicts in Africa, perfect examples of which have just been provided by Nigeria and Cameroon with the resolution of the issue of the Bakassi peninsula, and by Gabon and Equatorial Guinea with the agreement on a mediation process in connection with their territorial dispute.

Nevertheless, conflicts persist in Africa and the Middle East that require appropriate involvement by the international community. With regard to the situation in the Sudan, my delegation welcomes the appointment Mr. Djibril Yipènè Bassolé, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Burkina Faso, as the Joint African Union-United Nations Chief Mediator for

Darfur. We are certain that Mr. Bassolé will provide new momentum and help to improve the situation in that brotherly country by, among other things, facilitating the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed in January 2006 between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army with regard to the Southern Sudan, and by helping to find an acceptable solution for Darfur.

With regard to Somalia, we welcome the agreement signed on 9 June in Djibouti between the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia. We urge the United Nations to do everything possible to support those countries, both by more effectively backing the African Union Mission in Somalia and by deploying an international peacebuilding or peacekeeping force.

The bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians that have begun in the context of the commitments undertaken at the Annapolis Conference are a genuine source of satisfaction for my delegation. We believe that the parties should take advantage of those negotiations. We therefore encourage them to maintain the momentum of Annapolis, which reflected the willingness of the parties concerned to make progress towards peace. We should also like to welcome the recent initiative of President Nicolas Sarkozy of France in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference. We fervently hope that all those measures will make it possible to reach a speedy agreement that enshrines the vision of the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders and on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, the Arab peace initiative and the Quartet's road map.

We welcome the Doha agreement on Lebanon, which confirmed the virtue of dialogue and cleared the path for speedy presidential elections and the establishment of a Government. The international community should support the Lebanese people who, through that agreement, have demonstrated their political maturity and ongoing desire for national unity.

The various peace processes now underway will not be successful unless confidence-building measures are first put in place. In that regard, there is a crucial need to find solutions to the issues of disarmament, non-proliferation and the eradication of the trade in small arms. That is especially true for the poorest countries, who pay a heavy price in conflicts sustained by the trade in small arms and light weapons. My delegation therefore deplores the failure at the past session of the Disarmament Commission, another in a series due to the lack of consensus on the agenda.

As we have seen, the challenges in the area of international peace and security are numerous and complex. Unfortunately, for some of us they are accentuated by other serious, recurring and even chronic threats. As the 2005 World Summit acknowledged in its Outcome Document, those threats, which also have an effect on development, are closely linked to other areas in which the United Nations is active, namely, peace, security and human rights.

We therefore believe that the year 2008 is critical, given that it is replete with major events that could contribute to development. I am referring to the Doha Round of trade negotiations, which are at a standstill today; the high-level event on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) midpoint to the target date for their implementation, the Accra High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness; and the Review Conference of the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development.

In the quest for global well-being, Africa and countries in special circumstances — especially least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island States — deserve focused attention commensurate with their situation. My delegation would like to pay homage to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his personal commitment and unwavering support for initiatives in that regard intended to benefit Africa. Following the G8 Summit at Heiligendamm, the Secretary-General established the Africa Steering Group to monitor the achievement of the MDGs in Africa. With the support of a working group, the Steering Group is responsible for finding ways to coordinate and rationalize efforts associated with technical and financial assistance in order to speed up Africa's progress. That initiative is very timely for a country like Niger, whose strategy to reduce poverty and speed up development for the period 2009-2012 focuses precisely on the achievement of the MDGs. Moreover, the various efforts of the Government in recent years in the areas of health, education and access to water have already led to a significant improvement in the relevant indicators.

The recommendations of the Steering Group and the conclusions of the recent high-level meeting on the MDGs, jointly organized by the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, provide a very clear course of action for making progress.

Sustainable development is the main theme of the Economic and Social Council's 2008 substantive session. The current debate has clearly shown that such development cannot be achieved without appropriate funding, aid effectiveness and good governance.

In conclusion, the delegation of Niger believes that the United Nations is the world's premier forum. It must serve as a beacon in those times of both hope and uncertainty, and ensure collective security in the world by means of economic, social and cultural cooperation. That is why we need genuine reform of the United Nations system. My delegation believes that the reform effort will remain incomplete unless there is a significant change in the Security Council, including as regards both equitable representation and its working methods.

In numerous other areas currently under consideration — such as, among others, evaluating the experiences of countries involved in pilot programmes on system-wide coherence and revitalizing the General Assembly, which we must ensure — my country will contribute as much as it can to adapting our common Organization to the challenges we all face in building a world of peace, prosperity and development.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations A/63/PV.14

General Assembly
Sixty-third session

Official Records

14th plenary meeting
Saturday, 27 September 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Sergey V. Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

Mr. Lavrov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): On 11 September 2001, the world changed, and it rallied together in the fight against the threat of terror, a threat that was common for all and knew no boundaries. I am referring to threat of terrorism. The world displayed an unprecedented level of solidarity by rejecting old phobias and stereotypes. It seemed that the global counter-terrorism coalition became a new reality that from then on would define the development of a system of international relations free from double standards and beneficial to all.

The cohesion in the face of the deadly threats emerging from Al-Qaida and other elements of international terrorism made it possible to achieve tangible success during the initial stage. But later, problems began to appear. A painful blow to the unity of the anti-terrorism coalition was delivered by the war in Iraq, when — as it turned out later, under the false pretext of the fight against terror and nuclear arms proliferation — international law was violated. The deepest crisis was thus created in a completely artificial way and even today it is far from being resolved.

Ever more questions are being raised about what is going on in Afghanistan. First and foremost, what is the acceptable price to pay in terms of the loss of civilians' lives in the ongoing counter-terrorism operation? Who decides on criteria for determining proportionality in the use of force? And why are the international contingents that are present unwilling to engage in the fight against the proliferating drug threat that causes increasing suffering in the countries of Central Asia and Europe? These and other factors give us reason to believe that the counter-terrorism coalition is faced with a crisis.

Looking at the core of the problem, it seems that this coalition lacks the requisite collective arrangements: equality among all its members in deciding on strategy and, especially, operational tactics. But in order to control the entirely new situation that evolved after 9/11, which required genuine cooperative effort, including joint analysis and coordination of practical steps, mechanisms designed for a unipolar world began to be used: decisions were taken in a single centre of power, while the rest merely had to follow.

We ended up with a privatization of the international community's efforts in the fight against terrorism. The inertia of the unipolar world also revealed itself in other spheres of international life, including unilateral steps taken in anti-missile defence and the militarization of outer space as well as in attempts to bypass parity in arms control regimes, expansion of political-military blocs, and politicization

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of the issues of access to and transport of energy resources.

The illusion of the existence of a unipolar world confused many. For some people, it generated a desire to place all of their eggs in one basket. In exchange for absolute loyalty, there was an expectation of carte blanche to resolve all problems, using any means. The emerging syndrome of complete permissiveness that developed led to a rampage on the night of 8 August, when aggression was unleashed on South Ossetia. The bombing of the sleeping city of Tskhinvali and the killing of civilians and peacekeepers trampled under foot all existing settlement agreements, thus putting an end to the territorial integrity of Georgia.

Russia helped South Ossetia to repel that aggression, and carried out its duty to protect its citizens and fulfil its peacekeeping commitments. Russia's recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was the only possible step to ensure not only their security, but also the very survival of their peoples, considering the previous record of chauvinism of the Georgian leaders — starting with the Georgian leader Zviad Gamsakhurdia who, in 1991, under the slogan of "Georgia for Georgians", ordered the deportation of Ossetians to Russia, abolished the autonomous status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and later unleashed a bloody war against them.

That war was brought to an end at the cost of innumerable human lives, and peacekeeping and negotiation mechanisms were established with the approval of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). However, the current Georgian leadership has pursued a persistent policy of undermining those mechanisms through relentless provocation, and finally nullified the peace process by launching a new murderous war on the night of 8 August.

This problem is now closed. The future of the peoples of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been reliably secured by the treaties between Moscow and Tskhinvali and Sukhumi. With the implementation of the Medvedev-Sarkozy plan, to which we are strongly committed, the situation around the two republics will finally be stabilized. It is important that this plan shou'd be strictly and unswervingly implemented by all parties. We are concerned, however, by the attempts to rewrite it after the fact.

I believe that everyone here has tired of playing the role of extras for the Georgian regime, whose words contain not a shred of truth and whose foreign policy is aimed exclusively at provoking confrontation throughout the world in the pursuit of their own objectives which invariably run counter to the objectives of the Georgian people and to the goal of ensuring security in the Caucasus.

Today, it is necessary to analyse the crisis in the Caucasus from the viewpoint of its impact on the region and the international community as a whole. The world has changed yet again. It has become absolutely clear that the solidarity demonstrated after 9/11 must be revived through approaches untainted by geopolitical expediency and built on the rejection of double standards when fighting against any violations or breaches of international law — whether on the part of terrorists, political extremists or any others.

The crisis in the Caucasus has proved again that it is impossible to resolve the problems we face when blinded by the mirage of a unipolar world. The price we will have to pay in terms of human lives and destinies is too high. We cannot tolerate any attempts to resolve conflict situations by violating international agreements or by the unlawful use of force. If we allow that to occur once, then we run the risk of unleashing it in the future.

One cannot invoke the duty to defend in the abstract, and then be outraged when that principle is used in practice — and in strict conformity with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and other norms of international law. In South Ossetia, Russia defended the highest of our common values, the most essential human right: the right to live.

The existing security architecture in Europe did not pass the test of recent events. Attempts to adjust it to the rules of a unipolar world led to a situation where that architecture proved incapable of containing an aggressor or preventing the supply of offensive weapons to it, contrary to all existing relevant codes of conduct.

We propose that this issue should be addressed in a comprehensive manner. President Dmitry A. Medvedev, of Russia, speaking in Berlin on 5 June, proposed an initiative on developing a Euro-Atlantic security treaty, a type of "Helsinki II". This work could have been started at the Pan-European summit with the

participation of all States as well as all organizations working in the region.

The treaty which we are proposing is meant to create a reliable collective security system that would ensure equal security for all States and set out, in legally binding form, the bases of relations among all participants, with a view to strengthening peace, ensuring stability and promoting integrated and manageable development efforts across the vast Euro-Atlantic region. This would be a process in which all parties would reaffirm their commitment to fundamental principles of international law, such as the non-use of force; peaceful settlement of disputes; sovereignty; territorial integrity; non-interference in internal affairs; and the inadmissibility of strengthening one's own security by infringing upon or endangering the security of others. We also need to consider together new mechanisms to ensure compliance with those fundamental principles. Naturally, such a treaty should organically fit into the legal framework of the United Nations Charter and its principles of collective security.

The cold war distorted the nature of international relations and turned them into an arena for ideological confrontation. Only now, after the cold war has ended, can the United Nations, created on the basis of a polycentric vision of the world, fully realize its potential. Today as never before, it is important that all States reaffirm their commitment to the United Nations as a global forum, to which there is no alternative and which possesses a universal mandate and generally recognized legitimacy, and as a centre for open, candid and frank debate and coordination of world policies on a just and equitable basis free from double standards. This is an essential requirement to ensure that the world regains its equilibrium.

The multitude of challenges that humanity is facing require comprehensive strengthening of the United Nations. In order to keep up with the times, the United Nations requires further rational reform to be able to gradually adapt itself to existing political and economic realities. On the whole, we are satisfied by the progress of the reform, including the initial results of the activities of the recently established Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council.

With regard to expansion of the membership of the Security Council, we will, of course, welcome proposals that do not divide United Nations Member States but rather facilitate the search for mutually acceptable compromises and lead to a broad-based agreement.

Of increasing importance in the reform process is the promotion of dialogue and partnership among civilizations. Russia supports the Alliance of Civilizations and other initiatives in that regard. We reiterate our proposal that a consultative council of religions be established under United Nations auspices, taking into account the increasing role of the religious aspect in international life. That would assist in strengthening moral principles and incorporating them into international affairs.

Among the priorities of United Nations activities, a number of urgent issues have recently appeared on the Organization's agenda, including climate change and food and energy security. Those problems are global and interrelated, and they can be addressed and resolved only through a global partnership at a qualitatively new level, with active involvement by Governments, the scientific and business communities and civil society.

In particular, the current financial crisis requires urgent attention and synergy of efforts. From this rostrum, the President of France has put forward important initiatives aimed at a cooperative search for ways to revitalize the international financial system that involve the world's leading economies. In that context, we support the further development of partnerships between the members of the Group of Eight and key States in all developing regions. The Economic and Social Council could also play a role here. Russia will continue to participate responsibly in the work of various bodies of the United Nations system and in other contexts to help find an equitable solution to all those problems.

The international development assistance mechanisms being established in Russia will help us to increase the extent and effectiveness of our participation in international efforts to fight hunger and disease, to promote broader access to education and to overcome energy shortages, which will be our additional contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It is only natural that, in so doing, we should pay particular attention to assisting nearby countries. All countries have partners with which they share traditional friendly relations

based on a common history and geography. It is wrong to artificially undermine such relationships for the benefit of geopolitical schemes and against the will of the people.

We will continue to work together with all our neighbours. First and foremost, along with the other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, we will continue to develop the integration processes within the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Community in order to preserve and promote our common heritage of culture and civilization, which, in a globalizing world, is a major resource of the Commonwealth and of each of its member States. That is why we have a particular interest in cooperating with those countries, and it is also why they view Russia as an area of special interest. We will therefore base our relations on the principles of equality, mutual benefit, respect for and consideration of one another's interests and compliance with existing agreements, in particular those on the peaceful settlement of disputes. That is also the way in which we intend to develop our relations in other regions of the world: openly, on the basis of international law and without any zero-sum games. Those principles were set out in the foreign policy concept approved by President Medvedev in July this year.

Russia is consistently implementing its network diplomacy and promoting cooperation in various formats: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the BRIC countries — Brazil, Russia, India and China — partnership mechanisms with the European Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States and regional organizations in Latin America.

The developments that occurred in August gave us yet another occasion to think about the responsibility to report events accurately. Distortions of reality hamper international efforts to settle conflicts and crises and revive the worst practices of the cold-war era. If we wish to prevent the truth from becoming the first casualty of war, we must draw the appropriate conclusions, in particular in the light of a provision of the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, which states that States have the duty to refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression. That is in line with the Guidelines on protecting freedom of expression and information in times of crisis, recently adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. I propose that the United Nations also issue a statement on that issue, this time in a universal context.

The obvious global effects of the crisis in the Caucasus show that the world has changed for everyone. There are now fewer illusions and fewer pretexts for refusing to respond to the most urgent challenges of modern times. That is precisely why we hope that the international community will, on the basis of common sense, finally manage to develop a programme of collective action for the twenty-first century.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdelwaheb Abdallah, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia.

Mr. Abdallah (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset to sincerely congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We are convinced that your diplomatic ability and skill will help us to ensure the success of this session and to attain the objectives to which we all aspire. I should also like to thank Mr. Srgjan Kerim for his excellent work and his valuable contributions to the smooth conduct of the previous session. Our sincere thanks go also to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his generous efforts to promote the work of the Organization and to enhance its performance in addressing various issues of importance to our countries and peoples.

The choice of the main theme of this year's general debate — the impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world — reflects the importance of that issue and the growing awareness among all countries of its seriousness and of the need to work together to find effective solutions to reduce its impact and repercussions on national economies, particularly those of developing and poor countries, and on the increasing rates of poverty and hunger throughout the world.

In that context, the central role played by the United Nations is of crucial importance in addressing those issues and in striving to achieve a better balance in international relations and greater solidarity, justice and equality. That requires that we enhance the

Organization's reform process and strengthen its capacity to keep abreast of international developments.

In recent years, the world situation has been characterized by increasingly swift change, which has disrupted international balances and undermined prevailing development formulas. It has also created many problems and difficulties that have clearly affected the economies and development processes of many countries. In addition, it has weakened their capacity to make progress and increased their vulnerability. Furthermore, the world has recently witnessed serious economic problems, in particular an excessive rise in oil and basic food prices, which has threatened world food security and reduced the purchasing power of individuals, thus hampering the achievement of the goals and approaches set at the Millennium Summit. If we are to address this grave situation, we must step up international efforts by adopting development strategies based on the noble human aspects of world solidarity. In that context, Tunisia has called on international financial institutions and other organizations that specialize in economy and trade to establish and implement agricultural and production policies that guarantee the availability of food, which is a fundamental right enshrined in international human rights instruments.

I should like to take this opportunity to reiterate our call for intensified efforts to operationalize the World Solidarity Fund, endorsed by the General Assembly in 2002 (resolution 57/265) on the initiative of Tunisia as a mechanism to address the issues of poverty and privation in the world and to reduce disparities among peoples.

In order to keep abreast of the profound changes on the international scene and the new realities they have produced in international relations, along with the various challenges and complexities those changes represent, we must act to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to act more efficiently. We must also endeavour to reform the Organization, develop its structures and enhance the role it is expected to play to ameliorate the current international situation and turn globalization into a process that helps to guarantee peace and development for all peoples.

In that context, Tunisia supports all efforts and initiatives aimed at establishing new frameworks and mechanisms for action that can help to find collective solutions to common challenges in the vital fields of security, peace, development, the environment and food security, as part of an appropriate approach to international relations founded on the complementarity between peace, security and development. However, that should be accompanied by strengthened multilateral action on the basis of cooperation, solidarity and a constructive dialogue among all countries.

Despite efforts to contain it, the heightened problem of terrorism in the world strengthens our belief in the need to unify the international approach to fighting that scourge and finding adequate solutions to it. Since the early 1990s, Tunisia has warned the international community against the dangers of terrorism and has called for the adoption of a comprehensive and efficient approach that takes into consideration the root causes of the scourge. Today, we renew the call of His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to convene an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations to develop an international code of conduct for the fight against terrorism to which all parties shall commit themselves.

Climate change and the resulting intensification of the problems of desertification, drought and the lack of drinking water pose a threat to all humankind today and are a source of great concern to all. While affirming the close link between the environment and development and the crucial importance of promoting cooperation and solidarity to respond to the challenges in that regard, we should like to emphasize the need to include concerns about the potential effects of climate change, particularly in the African and Mediterranean regions, among the international community's priorities, as called for in the Tunis Declaration adopted by the International Solidarity Conference on Climate Change Strategies for the African and Mediterranean Regions, which was held in Tunisia in November 2007.

We would also like to reiterate the need to mobilize the necessary financial resources to promote research into climate monitoring and meteorology and the development of natural disaster early warning systems, in addition to the need to invest in reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.

We are convinced that the success of development efforts and the strengthening of

cooperation among our countries depend on providing a secure and stable international environment. Obstacles to success in that effort include the intensification of tensions and conflicts and the persistence of unresolved problems. In that regard, we reaffirm Tunisia's commitment to the values of peace and to the principles of international legality as the path to achieving just and lasting solutions to pending international issues. We also renew our determination to promote the values of moderation, tolerance and mutual respect in relations among countries and peoples and to establish bridges of communication and dialogue among all civilizations, cultures and religions.

In that context, while reaffirming Tunisia's position in support of our Palestinian brothers and their just cause as a people, we renew our call to the international community, especially its most influential members and the Quartet, to increase their efforts to bring Israel to end its aggressive practices and settlement activities. We call on them to intensify their work to reinvigorate the peace effort and to facilitate the resumption of negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis on the basis of the relevant international terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the results of the Annapolis Conference, with the aim of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question.

Such a solution would guarantee that the Palestinians regain their legitimate national rights and establish an independent Palestinian State on their national territory. It would also guarantee the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories, including Syrian and Lebanese land. That solution would also provide security and stability for all the peoples of the region.

We also call for joint regional and international efforts to address the deterioration of security and humanitarian conditions in Iraq and to help the brotherly Iraqi people to restore security and stability so that they may devote their energies to reconstruction efforts while preserving their national and territorial unity.

We wish to take this opportunity to express our satisfaction with the recent positive developments in our sisterly country of Lebanon, namely, the election of the country's President and the establishment of a Government of national unity. We trust that our Lebanese brothers will further strengthen that process in order to preserve Lebanon's security and stability.

Since the change of 7 November 1987, and under the wise leadership of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia, we have succeeded in accomplishing remarkable achievements in every area, due to substantial reforms that have strengthened the democratic process, promoted mechanisms to protect human rights and culture and consecrated public freedoms. Those reforms have enabled us to expand the scope of consultation and participation by the various sectors of civil society in identifying major trends and determining crucial national options within the framework of the rule of law and respect for institutions.

Those reforms have also made it possible to achieve many of the Millennium Development Goals, which has led to the improvement of living standards and the well-being of all segments of Tunisian society. Those achievements reflect the sound development choices and approaches implemented in Tunisia, which have allowed us to reach a high position on the list of countries with the highest human development indicators. That has earned Tunisia the respect of international financial institutions and the specialized agencies of the United Nations.

In its various development plans, Tunisia has continued to work for development and modernization in order to strengthen its capacity to keep up with international changes and actively contribute to building a world of peace and security and to make international relations more balanced and based on solidarity.

Based on its desire to achieve a higher level of integration at the regional and international levels, Tunisia is working to expand its participation in regional and international organizations and to develop political relations with friendly countries. It also endeavouring to expand and diversify its scope of cooperation with them so as to establish an effective partnership based on mutual respect and common interests. In that regard, Tunisia firmly believes that the Arab Maghreb Union is a strategic and crucial choice for all peoples of the region. In cooperation and coordination with the other friendly Maghreb countries, we are sparing no effort to speed up the establishment of the Union.

Tunisia is also eager to promote joint Arab action and to enhance its ability to interact with regional and international bodies in order to address the changes taking place in the region and to contribute to the promotion of the reform and modernization process in the Arab world, in conformity with the decisions of the 2004 Arab summit held in Tunis.

With regard to Africa, Tunisia is contributing to the achievement of peace and security in the continent by participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations and by developing economic relations with friendly African countries. Based on our belief in the importance of joint African action and the fact that the African Union is the ideal framework to address the continent's problems and achieve the integration to which our peoples aspire, Tunisia reaffirms its strong determination to pursue the process decided within the framework of the African Union to establish and operationalize its institutions, enhance its role in the resolution of conflicts and promote the development process in Africa.

With regard to Europe, Tunisia attaches strategic importance to its relations with the European Union (EU) and is continuing to work to develop those relations on the basis of a solidarity-based partnership with EU countries on the basis of dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect. The building of a Euro-Mediterranean cooperation framework is one of Tunisia's priorities and a tenet of its foreign policy. Tunisia has therefore supported every initiative and mechanism that contributes to the promotion of peace, solidarity and development in the Mediterranean region — including the Barcelona process, the 5+5 Dialogue, and the Mediterranean Forum.

Tunisia was among the first countries to welcome the French initiative on the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean. We are convinced that the future of that initiative depends upon an effective partnership that guarantees the active participation of the countries of the southern Mediterranean in establishing the foundations of the Union and in the taking of decisions of concern to the region.

Meeting the challenges posed by the new international situation and the profound changes taking place on the world scene requires us all to step up efforts to further entrench the noble universal principles and humanist values on which the United Nations was founded. It also requires perseverance in enhancing the process of United Nations reform to make its work more efficient and to ensure its active contribution to providing optimum international conditions that can help us find collective solutions to common challenges and current international issues, respond to our peoples' aspirations for stability, and provide the appropriate conditions for prosperity and well-being in an environment of cooperation and solidarity-based development.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Kinga Göncz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Hungary.

Ms. Göncz (Hungary): At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election. In fulfilling your challenging tasks during this session, you may rest assured of the support and cooperation of the delegation of the Republic of Hungary. I also wish to salute your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, representative of the Eastern European Group, who served us with distinction and dedication.

The challenges we have to face daily in an increasingly globalized world require answers based on the principle of universally accepted values and the practice of flexible adaptation to swift changes in our environment. That need is reflected in the new external relations strategy adopted by the Hungarian Government at the beginning of this year. Our strategy, policies and actions demonstrate our commitment to upholding the rule of international law, to giving priority to effective multilateralism, to spreading the culture of cooperation and the peaceful settlement of international disputes, and to working towards preserving a liveable and sustainable environment for future generations. Hungary's geographic position and its expertise in democracy building, good governance, promoting the rule of law and human rights, disarmament and non-proliferation will serve as a good basis for our effective contribution to the work of the Organization.

Skyrocketing energy prices, food and financial crises and commodity speculation are endangering the results we have attained so far towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A coherent and coordinated response is needed to reverse that process. As an emerging donor country, Hungary firmly believes that the international community cannot use the difficulties we all face as an excuse not to do the utmost to achieve the MDGs.

We are firmly dedicated to broadening the outreach of our foreign policy to the developing countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. International development cooperation and assistance are a growing segment of our foreign policy. We are strongly committed to intensifying our efforts in the years to come. We are therefore gradually increasing our official development assistance, concentrating primarily on those activities where Hungary has comparative advantages, especially in the areas of agriculture to combat famine and poverty through the introduction of modern growing facilities, animal husbandry technologies, forestry and fisheries programmes, water management, developing health services and promoting good governance.

Every day we are ruining our environment through the intensive pace of development and the emission of greenhouse gases. To address that challenge, we need a more effective institutional framework that includes clear political guidance; adequate, stable and predictable funding; a strong scientific base; and improved assessment of activities and emergency response institutions. Hungary fully agrees that the matter is urgent and hopes that the ongoing deliberations on the future of the United Nations Framework Climate Change Convention and the Kyoto Protocol will lead to concrete results in the coming year.

This year we mark the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as 15 years of the existence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Over the past 60 years, humankind has made extraordinary progress in the promotion and protection of human rights. Our job is to work hard for the full implementation of human rights treaties. Our expectations were fulfilled on 3 May of this year when the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities entered into force. Hungary became the second Member State to ratify the Convention and its Optional Protocol. We hope that it will be universally accepted in the near future.

We strongly supported the establishment of the Human Rights Council and we are determined to continue to do so. In our view, the time has come for the Council, as well as for all of us, to redouble our dedicated efforts to make the work of the Human Rights Council more efficient.

Following the adoption of a consensus resolution by the Council last September, the Forum on Minority Issues will hold its first session at the end of 2008. I am personally very proud that the first Forum session will be chaired by a fellow Hungarian, Ms. Viktória Mohácsi, a member of the European Parliament. I hope that, under her guidance, the Forum on Minority Issues will be widely recognized, efficient and results-oriented.

We firmly believe that a lasting solution to current challenges cannot be achieved without the effective involvement of women in all aspects of international cooperation. I would like to state that Hungary fully supports the initiative to undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) by 2010, and I am confident that the United Nations should play a leadership role.

The United Nations and the European Union — together with Governments, non-governmental organizations and other international organizations around the world — have made tremendous efforts to promote international cooperation in the area of the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities. However, the steps taken thus far still fall short of preventing the many dreadful crimes against humanity. As a Member of the United Nations and the European Union, Hungary is fully committed to the idea of preventing genocide and is ready to take specific steps to that end. We have decided to prepare a feasibility study on the establishment in Budapest of an international centre for the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities. In our view, it should be an independent institution with the aim of contributing to international efforts to prevent the occurrence of genocide.

The most important outstanding issue in the area of counter-terrorism, is the full and speedy implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (see resolution 60/288), for which Member States have the main responsibility. Concluding a comprehensive convention on international terrorism also remains a high priority for the Republic of Hungary, and we fully support the work of the Ad Hoc Committee in that regard. We hope that we will be able to finalize the drafting of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism during the sixty-third session.

In spite of the many security and political challenges that still persist in Afghanistan, we acknowledge and appreciate the achievements of the international community and the enormous work that has been done so far to bring about tangible improvements in the everyday lives of the Afghan people. In that process, the United Nations Mission in Afghanistan remains instrumental, especially in the preparation and conduct of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in 2009 and 2010. Hungary remains committed to helping Afghanistan to rebuild following many years of war and to create a State that is safe, stable and democratic. We are committed to continuing our military assistance as a leading nation in the Provincial Reconstruction Team in the northern part of the country, as well as to expand our development activities in Afghanistan.

Contributing to peace and stability and achieving prosperity have constituted a cornerstone of Hungarian foreign policy in the Western Baikans for many years. We continue to believe that that goal is best served by actively supporting the integration of the region into Euro-Atlantic structures. As we all know, on 17 February, Kosovo declared its independence. A number of United Nations Member States recognized that independence, including Hungary. We deem it of crucial importance that a resolution of the Kosovo Assembly and its new constitution fully committed Kosovo to democracy, the rule of law, the protection of Serb communities and other minorities, the protection of cultural and religious heritage and the international presence. Without a stable Kosovo there can be no stability in the Balkans. In that context, we welcome and support the continued presence of the international community on the basis of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). We also remain committed to contributing to the stability of Kosovo through the European Union Rule of Law Mission, the International Security Force in Kosovo and an international civilian office as part of the international presence.

Hungary fully supports the efforts of the international community and various institutions to implement the peace agreement in Georgia. Hungary strongly believes in the peaceful settlement of conflicts. The use of military force to settle territorial disputes represents a dangerous precedent that can have further implications in the whole region and beyond. Any further steps and negotiations must be based on full respect for Georgia's sovereignty, territorial integrity, internationally recognized borders and democratically elected leadership. It is of crucial importance that all parties agree on a unified interpretation of the agreement. We fully support, and we are ready to participate in, the planned missions of the different international institutions, such as those of the EU and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in resolving the conflict and monitoring the implementation of the peace agreement. Hungary has offered humanitarian assistance, and we are studying further possibilities to assist Georgia.

Hungary attaches great importance to the comprehensive process initiated at the Annapolis Conference, convened by the President of the United States of America, in order to settle the Middle East conflict. Since Annapolis, there have been regular meetings between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. We hope that the peace process will lead to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the normalization of Israeli-Arab relations.

The Iranian nuclear programme continues to be a matter of serious concern for my Government. Iran has failed to provide the international community with credible assurances as to whether its nuclear projects are in line with its international obligations. We deeply regret that the leadership of Iran has refused to abide with the relevant Security Council resolutions. Only full and unconditional compliance with the demand to suspend its enrichment-related and reprocessing activities can pave the way for the re-establishment of confidence in the peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear programme and open up prospects for intensified economic and political cooperation. We hope that Iran will change its present course of confrontation and opt for constructive dialogue with its partners.

After five years of conflict, Iraq is showing clear signs of recovery for the first time. With the help of the international community, Iraq is achieving major milestones in the reconciliation and reconstruction process. Hungary welcomes the fact that the improved security situation allows for the establishment of a withdrawal schedule, assuming that a fundamental change in the capability of the Iraqi Government to take control provides grounds for a long-term settlement of the crisis.

Due to the conflict raging in Darfur, which is one of the most worrisome on the African continent, the situation in the Sudan and neighbouring countries is

still unpredictable and explosive. Hungary welcomes the extension of the mandate of African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur until 31 July 2009. It is essential that the mission be fully deployed by the end of the year. The establishment of criminal courts in the region paves the way towards a solution of the crisis in Darfur. Nevertheless, we should continue to follow the fragile peace process closely.

We are convinced that, in order to address the various challenges of the twenty-first century, the international community needs a strong, reformed and well-functioning United Nations. Progress has been made in all areas of United Nations reform in the past two years, with some new bodies becoming operational. In other areas we need further consultations and negotiations with Member States in order to achieve a lasting solution. Hungary is ready to contribute to those negotiations. We welcome the recent decision of the General Assembly to start the intergovernmental negotiations on the reform of the Security Council during the sixty-third session.

In conclusion, Hungary is strongly committed to work with you, Mr. President, during the sixty-third session of the General Assembly in attaining the objectives of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Kabinga Jacus Pande, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Zambia.

Mr. Pande (Zambia): At the outset, my delegation wishes to convey, on behalf of the people and the Government of the Republic of Zambia, our deepest and sincere appreciation and gratitude to Member States, as well as the United Nations, for the numerous messages of condolences we received following the loss of our beloved President, His Excellency Mr. Levy Patrick Mwanawasa, State Council, who passed away in Paris, France on 19 August 2008. Their messages of sympathy comforted and strengthened us immensely.

We are particularly indebted to the Government of Egypt for the medical attention rendered to our late President when he suffered a stroke while attending the African Union summit in Sharm el-Sheik on 29 June 2008 and for his subsequent evacuation to France. We are similarly grateful to the Government of France for the medical attention and hospitality availed to the late President up to the time of his death as well as for the repatriation of his body to Zambia for burial. The President was put to rest on 3 September 2008, which, incidentally, would have been his sixtieth birthday.

I wish to inform this Assembly that, in accordance with the Zambian Constitution, elections for the new President should be held within 90 days of the death or incapacitation of a sitting President. Thus, the Government has designated 30 October 2008 for the presidential by-election. In the spirit of transparency, accountability and good governance, the Zambian Government has invited international organizations, including the United Nations, to send election observers to the elections.

At this juncture, let me join others who have spoken before me in congratulating you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. Zambia has no doubt that you will steer this session to a successful conclusion. I wish to assure you of Zambia's support.

May I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, for ably presiding over the proceedings of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session.

I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts in his dedicated service to humankind in trying to maintain international peace and security, achieve development and eradicate poverty for all.

The theme for this session, "The impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world as well as the need to democratize the United Nations", is indeed testimony to the noble efforts of the Secretary-General. The theme is also most appropriate, especially since it is relevant to the development challenges currently facing Africa and the developing world as a whole.

It is confirmed in the Secretary-General's reports that many developing countries, and in particular sub-Saharan Africa, will not meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and that Member States should therefore redouble and reconfirm their commitments if we are to meet that target.

Zambia believes that the attainment of the MDGs will be meaningful only if it is all-inclusive. That will require the implementation of programmes and policies for empowering women, the girl child and other vulnerable groups of society be part of the overall process within that framework.

In that regard, Zambia supports the assertion that women's empowerment and gender equality are drivers for reducing poverty, building food security and reducing maternal mortality. It is in that realization that most of the States members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) signed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in August 2008 — the first of its kind in Africa.

Such regional and national efforts need to be complemented by global action. It is in that regard that Zambia welcomes the ongoing debate on reforms in the context of United Nations system-wide coherence, particularly as they relate to strengthening the gender architecture, which is currently fragmented and underresourced.

In the process of empowering women and striving for gender equality, Zambia realizes that HIV/AIDS continues to be a challenge to the country's development, with the prevalence rate for women being higher than that of men. The pandemic is robbing the country of a young and productive workforce. The Zambian Government therefore has put in place a number of policies that have helped to reduce the prevalence of HIV from 16 per cent in 2001 to 14 per cent in 2007. That reduction in the prevalence rate is an indication that our Government is determined to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. That would not, however, be possible without the support of the international community.

The Monterrey Consensus places obligations on developed and developing countries alike to come up with concrete strategies and action to address poverty. Most African countries, including Zambia, have resolved to develop their economies and embarked on prudent macroeconomic management, channelling resources to growth sectors that present the greatest prospect for wealth and employment creation. They have further developed policies, plans and programmes that are not only growth-oriented but also pro-poor and address social development.

I wish to acknowledge with appreciation the role that our cooperating partners and the international community have played and continue to play in all our development and poverty-eradication programmes. We welcome the commitments made by Africa and its cooperating partners in the context of various important initiatives and partnerships in recent years, inter alia, the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, which among other things, came up with a Follow-up Mechanism with regard to implementation of commitments made during the conference.

Similarly, the China-Africa Partnership and the European Union-Africa Strategic Partnership have also contributed substantially to Africa's development needs. With regard to the India-Africa Forum, we also look forward to the speedy implementation of commitments undertaken during the Summit Forum in India in April 2008.

Furthermore, we appreciate the assistance rendered by the G-8 Africa Partnership, the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief of the President of the United States of America, the comprehensive health-care initiative sponsored by the Government of Cuba, the Initiative for Africa's Development of the Republic of Korea and Pakistan's Special Technical Assistance Programme for Africa. In similar vein, we look forward to the implementation of the recently launched Africa-Turkey partnership forum.

Zambia notes with concern, however, that the efforts the cooperating partners are making with regard to improved access to the markets of the developed countries and official development assistance flows and finance for development for African countries have not been completely fulfilled. We commend the five cooperating partners that have met or exceeded the target of 0.7 per cent of their gross national income as their contribution to official development assistance. We urge the cooperating partners that have not fulfilled their commitments to do so. We also look forward to the upcoming Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus in Doha and hope donors will honour their commitments.

We are aware that improved market access for developing countries is one commitment that, once fulfilled, will offer the greatest prospects for our integration into the world trading system. It also has the potential to foster food security for all and to raise the standard of living of the majority of the population that depends on agriculture for its livelihood.

In that regard, Zambia notes with disappointment that the Doha Round of trade negotiations collapsed at a time when many of us were looking forward to a successful conclusion to those protracted talks. It is my country's hope that the negotiations will reconvene and

conclude as soon as possible so that the developing countries can compete favourably and become integrated into the multilateral trading system.

The current global oil and food crises not only pose a threat to the gains made in achieving macroeconomic stability and growth in developing countries, but are an even greater threat to the achievements made towards eliminating extreme poverty and reducing by half the proportion of people suffering from hunger.

A solution to the food crisis must be found as a matter of urgency. In that connection, Zambia wishes to thank the Secretary-General for establishing the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis, whose task is to find a coherent and coordinated approach to resolving the food crisis. In addressing the crisis, we must be mindful of the fact that a large percentage of the people in developing countries depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Therefore, in finding a solution to high food prices, we should ensure that we do not inadvertently encourage rural-urban migration by including measures that are disadvantageous to those engaged in food and general agricultural production.

In addition, the issue of climate change, which has worsened the food crisis, requires the concerted efforts of the international community to address it through the development of adaptation and mitigation measures. Zambia, like most of sub-Saharan Africa, has not been spared the adverse effects of climate change, such as increased exposure to drought, rising temperatures, more erratic rainfall and extreme weather conditions. Those are threatening water and agricultural systems, thereby condemning millions more to face malnutrition and water shortages.

Mr. Tanin (Afghanistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Let me now turn to the ongoing reforms of the United Nations, in particular the protracted discussions on reform of the Security Council. Zambia wishes to reiterate the fact that United Nations reform will not be complete without meaningful reform of the Security Council. Any new proposals to reform the Council should take into account Africa's call for two permanent seats with the veto power and two additional non-permanent seats, as that will not only address the historical injustice against Africa, but also respond to the need to democratize the Security Council, given that Africa constitutes the second-largest bloc of the United Nations membership. Equally important in that regard will be the need to reform the working methods of that important United Nations body.

It is a matter of concern to Zambia that the question of Western Sahara has remained unresolved for such a long time. In accordance with the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960, the people of Western Sahara should be free to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination. In that regard, Zambia calls for the implementation of all relevant United Nations resolutions on that matter, while supporting the ongoing efforts between the parties concerned to find a lasting solution.

With regard to the situation in Zimbabwe, Zambia welcomes the signing of the Inter-Party Agreement on 15 September 2008 and pays tribute to former South African President Thabo Mbeki, who, on behalf of SADC, successfully discharged the mandate entrusted to him. We remain optimistic that the concerned parties will adhere to the Agreement, which has created a good basis for addressing the socio-economic problems confronting the country. In that regard, we appeal to the international community to provide all possible support to the people of Zimbabwe in their efforts to resuscitate their economy.

There is no doubt that the United Nations remains the only multilateral institution capable of addressing the challenges of our one world. The world's poor are looking to the United Nations system to deliver on its commitments to enable them to live in dignity with every possible opportunity, free from hunger and diseases such as HIV/AIDS and, above all, in a peaceful, secure and environmentally sustainable world. Let us therefore not fail them, for they deserve no less.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Mohlabi Tsekoa, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Relations of the Kingdom of Lesotho.

Mr. Tsekoa (Lesotho): My delegation associates itself with the compliments extended to Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at the present session, to his predecessor and to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

We greatly welcome the convening and the outcomes of the two high-level meetings — one on Africa's development needs and the other on the Millennium Development Goals — that have been held during the course of this session of the General Assembly. Let us not lose the momentum generated by those two meetings.

Let me also thank the President of the General Assembly for advancing a very appropriate theme, "The impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world as well as the need to democratize the United Nations". The decision of the Secretary-General to establish the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis demonstrates the determination of the United Nations to champion a unified response to the current food crisis. That is indeed emboldening, and we welcome the progress that has been achieved so far by the Task Force in producing the Comprehensive Framework for Action.

The food crisis poses a serious threat to the fragile progress that is being made towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It can also be a source of political instability in developing and often vulnerable countries. Policy initiatives that should be implemented by relevant stakeholders to overcome the crisis were adequately articulated in the outcome documents of the High-Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy, held in Rome in June 2008. There, the bottom line was clearly drawn that, while current energy needs are real and urgent, they cannot and should not be allowed to compete with the call to ensure food security. The stakes are too high in many developing countries, Lesotho included, where abject poverty, malnutrition and the spread of HIV and AIDS have reached unacceptable levels. All humankind has a right to food, and hunger constitutes a violation of human dignity.

That is why my delegation regrets the lack of progress in the implementation of previous international commitments to fight hunger, particularly those contained in the outcomes of the 1996 and the 2002 World Food Summits. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reducing by half the number of undernourished people by 2015 will not be achieved unless there is visible movement from rhetoric to action.

Lesotho was encouraged by the G8 Statement on Global Food Security that was recently issued at the Hokkaido Toyako summit. The Statement highlighted the importance of stimulating world food production and of increasing investments in agriculture. Hope-raising pledges were made at that summit and earlier ones. What remains to be done as a matter of great urgency is to deliver on those promises. Also, we call upon other development partners, including the Bretton Woods institutions, to scale up their efforts to help farmers in the least developed countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, to raise agricultural production and productivity.

The preparedness of the African continent to shoulder its responsibilities in this regard was clearly reflected in a declaration entitled "Responding to the Challenges of High Food Prices and Agriculture Development" that was recently adopted at the African Union summit in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, in July this year.

The establishment by the World Bank of two international Climate Investment Funds in May 2008, intended to provide innovative financing for developing countries to pursue cleaner development paths and also to help protect themselves from the impact of climate change, was another encouraging development. Our hope is that the Climate Investment Funds will be additional to existing official development assistance, which is so sorely needed by the developing countries to achieve the MDGs.

Peace and development are closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing. The United Nations cannot afford the luxury of complacency in its mandate for the maintenance of world peace and stability. Most importantly, let us not forget that the United Nations was born from the ashes of devastating world wars. Indeed, the primary purpose of the United Nations was and continues to be to prevent future wars and to create sustainable international security, but every year we witness the emergence of new hotspots and designer wars as some big and powerful States resort more and more to the use of force. Every time those States try to pursue the illusory goal of imposing their will by force on others, they create a more unstable and dangerous world.

Let me now address an issue of concern to my delegation — the abuse of the principle of universal jurisdiction. The Sharm el-Sheikh assembly of the

African Union was seized with the issue of the abuse of the principle of universal jurisdiction by some countries that seem inclined to use the principle to target certain African leaders.

Of course, lest I be misunderstood, we do recognize that universal jurisdiction is a principle of international law whose purpose is to ensure that individuals who commit such grave offences as genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity are brought to justice. That noble principle should be impartially and objectively applied so that it will not be abused for the political ends of some individuals or countries, as that could endanger international order and security.

It is a trite fact that the need for the application of the principle by individual States has been rendered unnecessary by the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC). If a State is unable or unwilling to deal with certain grave situations, such a matter should be referred to the Court, which will deal with it impartially. As we know, even the Security Council refers certain situations to the ICC. We need only emphasize that the ICC was created by this world body and must enjoy the support and trust of the entire membership of the United Nations. It must also be immune from any external influences.

As we respond to the invitation to comment on the second part of our theme, "The need to democratize the United Nations", we do so against the background of the integrity and credibility of the Security Council. We raise the issue of the integrity and credibility of the Council, recognizing fully its responsibility to uphold the three pillars of the United Nations: human rights, development and peace, and security.

The working methods of the Security Council continue to interest us precisely because the Council is the most powerful institution within the United Nations setting. It is charged with the responsibility for the maintenance of world peace and order and it is a custodian of human rights. In order to fulfil that mandate, the Security Council needs to always preserve its integrity and credibility. It is only when all Member States are convinced of its integrity and credibility that they will have confidence in it.

The Security Council can enjoy such confidence, however, if and only if it is seen to be transparent and democratic in its structures and accountable and responsible to the entire membership of the United Nations; if and only if it submits itself to the rule of law; if and only if it is objective and impartial in its work; if and only if the membership of the United Nations is convinced that it is not used as a policy instrument of any one State or group of States; and finally, if and only if it subjects all States Members of the United Nations to the same and equal treatment.

The Security Council should thus not turn a blind eye to a situation in one country and then act when a similar situation obtains in another. It must be an honest arbiter in conflicts. We all owe it to ourselves to work towards such reform of the Security Council that will help to preserve its integrity and credibility so that it can perform its lofty mandate more efficiently. Needless to say, the question of numbers, particularly numbers representing the African continent, is at issue, but I need not dwell on it as it has been amply covered by previous speakers.

Lesotho is also concerned that the Security Council continues to be seen to be encroaching on matters that fall within the powers and prerogatives of other organs of the United Nations, including the General Assembly. We believe that the Council must desist from assuming the legislative role of the General Assembly and from adopting binding resolutions that dictate domestic law for Member States. In some instances, the Council has sought to interfere in purely internal political matters that do not pose a threat to international peace and that, in any case, are being dealt with at the regional level. In our view, the usurpation by the Council of the mandates of other organs, including the Assembly, is not justifiable.

A few days ago, we witnessed a positive development in the southern Africa subregion when the leaders of the people of Zimbabwe put aside their political differences and joined hands to form a Government of national unity. We congratulate the people of Zimbabwe on that historic feat. We urge the international community to support the people of Zimbabwe in rebuilding their economy and in determining their destiny in an atmosphere of national harmony and peace. We also urge the leadership of Zimbabwe to ensure adherence to the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, as such adherence will have a catalytic effect on socio-economic initiatives in which Zimbabwe is involved.

Finally, we urge the Security Council to support efforts to bring to an end the unilateral economic and financial embargo that has, for decades now, been imposed against Cuba. We further urge the Council to intervene more decisively on behalf of the people of Palestine and Western Sahara, who have, also for decades, been denied the right to self-determination.

Lesotho is supportive of any efforts that will bring about lasting and sustainable peace in the Middle East and in other conflict areas in Africa, the Balkans and around our globe. We recall that in his report "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all", former Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: "Our guiding light must be the needs and hopes of peoples everywhere" (*A/59/2005, para. 12*).

Such is the call and challenge staring the United Nations in the face: to ensure a peaceful, safe, dignified and prosperous world in our time and for posterity.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Hassan Wirajuda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

Mr. Wirajuda (Indonesia): May I first congratulate Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I am sure that he will lead our deliberations with great wisdom and skill. I also wish to congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Srgjan Kerim, for ably guiding our sixty-second session.

It is timely and wise that we focus our deliberations on the global food crisis and on the democratization of the United Nations. While those two issues appear to be vastly different, they have more to do with each other than meets the eye. For democracy means nothing if a part of humankind is well fed while a larger part of it goes to bed hungry every night. Human equality is a mirage in any country where a part of the population struggles against obesity while a larger part of it wonders where the next meal is coming from.

I do not exaggerate. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, food prices will remain high for the next three to five years. Rice stocks are falling to their lowest level since the mid-1970s. Wheat stocks are sinking to their lowest since 1948. Compounding the situation is the explosive growth of the world population.

There is a huge unfilled demand for food. Food riots have already erupted in parts of the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. In 33 countries, especially those with fragile States, there is a real and present danger of social and political unrest because people are hungry. We must vigorously address the problem of global food insecurity. Otherwise, peace is at risk in the developing world and in pockets of poverty in the developed world. What the world needs today is a new Green Revolution — a Green Revolution that this time embraces the entire developing world, especially Africa. Developing countries must now put agriculture, especially food production, back into the core of their development agenda. For their part, the developed countries must put agriculture and food production into the core of their trade and aid programmes.

In that regard, the experience of Indonesia may be instructive. It is not easy to feed a population of 230 million, the fourth largest in the world, but there are no food riots in Indonesia. Last year, we had a surplus production of rice. We used that surplus to bolster our national stockpile. That has contributed to national stability. This year, we expect another surplus of 5 per cent, which brings production to 36 million tons. We are going to export part of that as our contribution to global food security.

We can do that because we have vastly improved our rice productivity by providing our farmers with microfinancing, improved seed varieties, cheap but appropriate farm technology and affordable fertilizers. We have thus developed some experience and expertise that worked for us and can work in other developing countries. We will continue to share those in the spirit of South-South cooperation.

Food security is a cause in which everyone must be involved. In that light, I firmly believe that this General Assembly of ours is called upon to take a number of concrete measures.

First, we can task the World Bank and the relevant United Nations bodies to develop ways and means of helping national Governments to spend more on agriculture and on rural infrastructures to empower small farmers.

Secondly, let us ensure that the appropriate United Nations bodies link up with regional mechanisms for food security, such as common food reserves and early warning systems on regional food

crises. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations has such an arrangement and so do other regional arrangements. The United Nations can serve as the hub, while the regional arrangements serve as the spokes of a global wheel for food security.

Thirdly, let us establish the framework for a global partnership on food security. We should ensure that the World Trade Organization Doha development negotiations reach a conclusion that supports increased food production. Let us make use of the forthcoming review of the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development as an opportunity to devise ways to fund the Green Revolution.

Let us be mindful, however, that agriculture does not always lead to a food harvest. It is even possible that an imprudent rush to produce biofuels will lead to a severe reduction of the food supply. It is true that by switching from fossil fuels to biofuels, we can cushion the impact of the skyrocketing of the world price of oil and thereby address the energy crisis. It is also true that, by making that switch in fuels, we reduce greenhouse gas emissions and thereby address the challenge of climate change.

It would be unwise and reckless, however, to address two crises by aggravating a third. We cannot allay the energy crisis and the crisis of global warming by deepening the global food crisis. That will only worsen the plight of humankind, but we can carry out a broad range of rational and coordinated policies and initiatives that address those crises systemically. We can address the energy crisis by developing all alternative sources of available energy, which will help mitigate global warming.

Moreover, in the next 16 months we can advance the climate change agenda through the Bali Road Map, all the way from Bali to Copenhagen through Poznan. Indonesia is fully committed to that process. After hosting the Bali conference that produced the Road Map, we have joined the troika of host countries to give the process a push among world leaders. By 2009, we should produce an ambitious post-2012 global climate regime that will contain global warming to within two degrees Celsius in the next 20 years. But even before the process is concluded in Copenhagen, we in Indonesia are partnering with other countries to enhance our topical forests and coral reefs in an effort to reduce carbon emissions.

Even as we face the challenge of global warming in the physical world, we must also deal with the reality of a global chill in the politico-security field. Symptoms of that chill are the military tensions that have arisen in Eastern Europe.

There is also a new arms race. There is more military spending now than there was at the end of the cold war. Moreover, the conflicts and tensions of a year ago are still with us. The dream of establishing a Palestinian State by the end of this year has virtually crumbled. The Iraqi and Afghan conflicts keep raging on. North Korea, the subject of so much uncertainty today, is backsliding from its commitment to dismantle its nuclear weapons programme. The nuclear issue in Iran remains unresolved.

In the face of those conflicts and tensions, the Security Council should have been more decisive. That the Council has failed to resolve them is a cause for concern. Of the issues that the Council has failed to resolve, two are of great concern to Indonesia, namely, those recent cases that directly infringe on the principle of the territorial integrity and political independence of States, both involving external intervention that led to the secession of a part or parts of a State. Both cases involved major Powers.

It is of the greatest importance to Indonesia and, I believe, to many developing countries that those recent cases do not set an ill-advised and dangerous precedent. Developing countries in the midst of nation-building and State-building would be extremely vulnerable to such precedents. The danger is that it takes only one misstep to kill principles that have been enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, such as the principle of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States. If we kill those principles, we have killed the ideal that holds the United Nations together.

The sovereignty of States must be preserved if there is to be a democratic spirit in international relations. That idea is essential because, without democracy, a world organization like the United Nations cannot be effective. Indeed, the failure of the Security Council to come to grips with recent challenges to global security is due largely to the fact that it is not democratic enough.

To make the Council more democratic, the use of the veto power of the permanent five must be regulated. The misuse of the veto by any one permanent member should no longer be allowed to

paralyse the entire Council. Democratization of the Council also means an equitable distribution of its membership, not only in terms of geographical representation, where we already have imbalances, but also in terms of constituencies. Hence, the world's major civilizations should be proportionately represented. The world's community of 1.1 billion Muslims must be represented on the Council if it is to be truly democratic.

The need for democratization is also deeply felt at the regional level. In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), I am pleased to say, we have responded to that need. The cause of democracy is gaining ground in the region as we transform ASEAN from a loose association into a true community that is firmly committed to the promotion of democracy and human rights. All members, without exception, strongly share that commitment.

It is in that spirit that Indonesia is launching the Bali Democracy Forum this December. It will be not an exclusive forum among democracies, but an inclusive and open forum for the countries of Asia to share their experiences and best practices in fostering democracy. A true democracy is always homegrown; it is never anything that is imposed from outside.

Meanwhile, we in Indonesia continue to tend to our young democracy. We are seeing to it that democracy takes root, not only by holding free elections, but also by working hard to provide good governance, to sustain a system of checks and balances among the three branches of Government, and to strengthen the roles of the mass media and civil society in our national life. Thus we pursue the democratic ideal: democracy at the level of the United Nations, democracy at the regional level and democracy within the nation.

At each of those levels, we hope to see nations and people taking control of their lives and taking part in the decision-making processes that shape their future. The realization of that ideal will give full meaning to the first three words of the Charter of the United Nations. Indeed, "We the peoples" is what democracy is all about.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Franck Biancheri, Government Councillor for External Relations and for International Economic and Financial Affairs of Monaco.

Mr. Biancheri (Monaco) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to convey to the President my congratulations on his election and to acknowledge, through him, the Latin American and Caribbean States that made his presidency of the General Assembly possible. Let me assure him and the other Assembly officers that my delegation will support them throughout the sixty-third session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his resolute action in favour of peace and reiterate to him our sincere and full support.

Finally, allow me to state what a great honour it is for me to take the floor today for the first time at the rostrum of this prestigious Hall.

The great and deeply missed poet Aimé Césaire said: "A civilization that is unable to resolve the problems that beset it is a decadent civilization." We know what the sufferings of our civilization are. We have identified the solutions needed to treat them. The issue at stake here is implementing those solutions.

Eight years ago, in this very Hall, all the States Members of the United Nations adopted the Millennium Declaration, the decisive tool in the fight against poverty, to promote peace, security and human rights, and to ensure a sustainable environment. It provided the framework for eight precise goals accompanied by clear time frames — the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

My message today is a simple one. The international community cannot afford to fail in the implementation of the MDGs, in spite of the threefold food, energy and environmental crisis seriously affecting the whole planet. To achieve the goals that we set ourselves at the dawn of the new millennium, we will have to step up our efforts and pursue concerted action in the only universal forum we have — the United Nations.

Eight years ago, we drew up together a scorecard with quantified goals and defined the steps to be taken to reduce poverty, fight hunger in the world and combat pandemics. Eight years ago, the situation was very alarming; we could not have imagined that things were to get worse.

Since then, we have been faced with the energy crisis and increasingly scarce resources, the food crisis and soaring prices of basic food products, and the

climate crisis resulting from the impact of human activities on the environment. Adding to that already very dark picture, we must now face the financial crisis, whose repercussions continue to be felt and whose full impact is yet to be seen.

Each country is suffering the consequences of those crises in a different way depending on its geography, its economy and its commercial and financial market exposure; and each country is attempting to face them with its own means. The Principality of Monaco, within its capabilities, has chosen to fight two of those crises — the food crisis and the climate crisis — with the resources at its disposal.

Much of the progress achieved in recent years in helping those populations suffering from hunger and malnutrition has been erased by soaring increases in the price of basic foodstuffs. Two billion human beings are seriously at risk even as world cereal production has reached a record high in 2008. The African continent, and in particular sub-Saharan Africa, with 60 per cent of its population affected by the crisis, is once again the worst-affected continent.

It remains nonetheless undeniable that the right to food is among the basic human rights. During the High-Level Conference in Rome last June, the international community adopted the Declaration on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy. Monaco fully supports the measures advocated in the Declaration and joins the call for the establishment of a world partnership centred on the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis.

A year ago, His Serene Highness Prince Albert II announced here his decision to substantially increase Monaco's official development assistance (ODA). The Principality's Government is sparing no effort to reach the target of allocating 0.7 per cent of its gross national income by 2015 by increasing our ODA by 25 per cent every year and focusing its actions on the least developed countries.

In 2008, 22 countries, mainly located around the Mediterranean basin and in sub-Saharan Africa, have benefited from a development partnership with the Principality. In addition to that bilateral cooperation, Monaco contributes on a regular basis to large-scale programmes of the United Nations system, such as the World Food Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Population Fund, whose expertise and structures facilitate the greatest assistance to the poorest populations.

Moreover, climate change and the imbalances it creates have a direct impact on the sustainability of our actions for development. The climate crisis, desertification and the shortage of water resources have exacerbated the food crisis.

Antoine de Saint Exupéry said: "We do not inherit the Earth from our parents; we borrow it from our children." Pursuing that analogy, the international community is not allocating sufficient funds to repay that loan.

Under the leadership of our Head of State and in collaboration with the Prince Albert II Foundation, the Government has committed itself actively in the International Polar Year to raise awareness among as many people as possible of the consequences of global warming. In that regard, the Arctic ice cap deserves all our attention since it serves as both an indicator of the consequences of global warming and as a vector of climate change through its gradual disappearance.

Last year, when adopting the resolution on oceans and the law of the sea, member States expressed their deep concern over the vulnerability of the environment and the fragility of ecosystems of the polar regions, particularly the Arctic Ocean and the Arctic ice cap. At Monaco's initiative, the decision on sustainable development of the Arctic region was adopted at the tenth special session of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, which was held in the Principality in February 2008.

We will pursue our commitment to that cause in the coming months when Monaco will host meetings on the Arctic: the first in November 2008, organized by the French presidency of the European Union, and the second organized by UNESCO early next year. I would also note that the Principality has solemnly confirmed its interest in the polar regions by acceding to the Antarctic Treaty on 31 May, and that His Serene Highness Prince Albert II will join a scientific mission to Antarctica in January.

Notwithstanding the obstacles we have encountered on the road since 2000, we have to stay on track. Indeed, let us roll up our sleeves, consult each

other and work together to multiply our forces and create genuine synergy.

I would like to reiterate here the deep commitment of the Principality of Monaco to the United Nations, the only genuinely universal organization, which has human rights and the promotion of dialogue among nations at its very core. The Charter of the United Nations guarantees the sovereign equality of States and the rule of law. Monaco has been a Member of the United Nations for 15 years. Since joining, our small Principality has covered a lot of ground on the international scene, becoming a member of the Council of Europe in 2004 and, very recently, joining the Union for the Mediterranean.

Without the United Nations, it is doubtful that human rights would have acquired their universal status, which today is indisputable. This year and next, many anniversaries remind us yet again of the essential role of the United Nations: the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The world has changed since the San Francisco Conference. Today, our task is to modernize the United Nations and ensure that its institutions adequately reflect our democratic principles and new geopolitical balances. As His Serene Highness Prince Albert II stated here last year, Monaco supports the expansion of the Security Council.

Only the combined efforts of all partners will allow us to make real progress in the fight against poverty, to promote health care and education, improve access to water and protect the environment. As indicated in the June 2008 recommendations of the MDG Africa Steering Group, the primary responsibility for achieving the MDGs remains with African Governments, which have shown tremendous leadership in recent years and launched ambitious programmes to attract the financial support of their development partners.

We have seen real progress since 2000, in particular in the area of health. Monaco, for its part, contributes to various WHO and UNICEF programmes and participates in efforts to combat HIV/AIDS, sickle cell anaemia, tuberculosis and malaria. However, the greatest national efforts, if made on an individual basis and without coordination, will not be enough to fight the scourges that affect our planet, and the African continent in particular.

The evaluation of ODA policies, the sharing of good practices, the coordination of development assistance, partnership with the private sector, microfinance and the pursuit of alternative revenue sources are all instruments that, together with the priority to be given to the central role of women in the economy, will enable us to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in the next seven years.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Vladimir Norov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Mr. Norov (Uzbekistan) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me at the outset to congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session and wish him every success in his work.

In the context of the agenda of the current session of the General Assembly, I would like to address the following issues, which we consider to be of the utmost importance and are directly relevant to the security and sustainable development of the Central Asian region.

First are the issues related to the continuing intensification and escalation of confrontation in Afghanistan, the increasing radicalization of the situation and the provocative terrorist statements by the fighters. Despite the enormous efforts and measures by the international community and coalition forces to support peace in Afghanistan, the situation, unfortunately, is deteriorating. The civilians are perishing.

What further exacerbates the situation in Afghanistan is the growing volume of drug trafficking. Today the production of opium in Afghanistan accounts for more than 8,000 tons, or over 90 percent of global production. It must be taken into consideration that drug trafficking is becoming one of the important sources of financing for fighters, destabilizing the situation in Afghanistan itself and in neighbouring States.

From this high rostrum, I would like to state again that we are deeply convinced that recent developments in the situation in Afghanistan show ever

more clearly that the Afghan problem cannot be resolved by the use of armed force, military means and increasing militarization alone. The war, which has been ongoing for close to 30 years, has destroyed both the economic and social infrastructure, led to the impoverishment of the population and, we must admit, has deprived people of any belief in a future and has provided fertile ground for recruiting more and more fighters.

The developing situation dictates the need to radically reconsider the approaches to resolving the Afghan problem. It is our firm belief that our main priorities must be providing targeted economic aid to Afghanistan, building and moulding economic and social infrastructure, ensuring employment opportunities and resolving the acute problem of combating poverty.

It is necessary to do everything we can to ensure respectful attitudes to national and religious values and the centuries-old traditions and customs of the multinational and multi-faith people of Afghanistan, and on that basis to bring together the conflicting forces. An important instrument for achieving such goals could be a return to the successful Six plus Two group on Afghanistan that successfully functioned in the middle of the 1990s under the auspices of the United Nations and transforming it into a Six plus Three group by taking into consideration contemporary realities and including in its make-up neighbouring States, Russia and the United States, and NATO.

As the President of Uzbekistan, Mr. Islam Karimov, has repeatedly underscored, the realization of such an initiative — which has already been called for from a number of international rostrums — could be a worthy alternative in achieving peace, stability and the revival of Afghanistan.

The outcomes of the high-level event on the Millennium Development Goals that took place on 25 September 2008 demonstrated that the international community needs to resolutely seek concrete results in achieving the goals in the sphere of development as formulated in the Millennium Declaration.

In that context, all of us share responsibility for the reasonable use of natural resources, including the transboundary rivers in Central Asia. Experience itself has shown that disregarding well-known United Nations declarations and international standards on the joint use of water resources of transboundary rivers can lead to very serious and at times tragic ecological disasters, as borne out by the ongoing catastrophe of the drying up of the Aral Sea, with all of its unforeseen consequences for the tens of millions of people in the region.

According to the fundamental provisions of United Nations conventions, all decisions on the use of the water of transboundary rivers in Central Asia, including the construction of hydropower facilities, must in no way inflict damage on the ecology of the region or infringe on the interests of the populations of neighbouring countries, nor should they upset the established balanced use of the water of transboundary rivers by all States in those rivers basins. In the case of damage, all measures must be taken to remove or mitigate such damage, and, if necessary, the issue of compensation must be raised.

We are convinced that compliance with those requirements must be mandatory in the implementation of various projects such as building hydropower facilities in Central Asia, including compliance by international financial institutions that wish to participate in such projects.

We are also convinced of the importance of expanding cooperation and strengthening interaction between the United Nations and the International Fund to Save the Aral Sea. In this respect, we consider it timely and necessary to grant the Fund observer status in the General Assembly, and we call upon Member States to support the draft resolution on this matter during the Assembly's sixty-third session.

This year in Uzbekistan we will widely observe the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and a programme of action dedicated to that most significant event has been approved. As of 1 January 2008, Uzbekistan fully abolished the death penalty and introduced habeas corpus, a democratic principle of justice. The adoption of the law on guaranteeing the rights of the child and the ratification of the International Labour Organization Minimum Age Convention and Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour have become important steps in ensuring human rights in Uzbekistan. We have adopted a national plan for implementing the commitments undertaken in those Conventions. Aware of the urgency of the problem of human trafficking at both domestic and international levels, in April 2008 Uzbekistan adopted its law against human trafficking.

Committed to the ideals and principles of human rights, Uzbekistan advocates gradual reforms and changes with the main purpose of ensuring peace in society and greater well-being of the people.

In conclusion, I want to underscore once again that Uzbekistan stands ready to engage in further constructive multilateral interaction within the United Nations framework to address the urgent issues on the agenda of the international community.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Dora Bakoyannis, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece.

Ms. Bakoyannis (Greece) (*spoke in French*): Sophocles said that all mankind is subject to error. We are gathered here in this Assembly in order to limit the scope of those errors and to ensure respect for the mandate of the United Nations. My Government fully agrees with the objectives and ideas expressed by President Nicolas Sarkozy as President of the European Union (see A/63/PV.5).

There is much that remains to be done and many obstacles to be overcome: armed conflict, hunger, poverty, environmental degradation, terrorism, organized crime, human trafficking, lack of respect for human rights and the abuse of power. All these things threaten what we wish to build in the United Nations: a community of States that enjoys progress, peace and prosperity.

Add the economic crisis the world faces now to those scourges, and it becomes difficult not to see the future as dark and menacing. As the poet Yeats described, we live in a world where

(*spoke in English*)

> "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

(*spoke in French*)

During this critical period, every country must make a choice: either to focus solely on its own limited interests and promote nationalistic ends in order to distract people's attention from danger throughout the world, or to look outwards, to open its mind and borders and to commit to warning people that the only way to face threats successfully is to do so together.

The history of Greece and the character of the Greek people are such that we have chosen the second path. It was in ancient Greece that society for the first time developed those ideals that are cherished today by free people throughout the world: democracy, equality and individual rights. More recently, we have lived through several wars, poverty and deprivation. Nevertheless, we endured, and we have been able once again to grab hold of the ideas that we were the first to profess.

We have not forgotten, however, what it is like to feel fear and need. This is why we will continue to work closely with all States, organizations and institutions to ensure that all people can live in security and can prosper and thrive.

The United Nations must be at the helm of this effort. In order to play its role efficiently, the United Nations needs increased support from us all, particularly in its efforts to develop and improve. Discussions about Security Council reforms and the need to breathe new life into the General Assembly have been going on for far too long. We hope that, starting at this session, today, concrete measures will be adopted to reach our objective.

(*spoke in English*)

This year we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unfortunately, gross violations of human rights persist throughout the world, and we Member States need to redouble our efforts to reduce them. The Human Rights Council could be a powerful force in that struggle, and Greece has decided to become a candidate for membership for the term beginning in 2012. We ask for the Assembly's support and trust.

Along with protecting human rights, the United Nations must strengthen its efforts to alleviate the bitter poverty that still grips many parts of the world. We need to increase trade for development, and we regret the lack of progress in the Doha Round. In 2000, we agreed on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), probably the most ambitious development project ever undertaken by man. In terms of time, we are halfway there. Yet a lot remains to be done. The progress achieved so far is jeopardized by higher prices, particularly for food and oil, and the global economic slowdown. Our success will be judged primarily in Africa.

We believe that one way to help jumpstart development in Africa is to involve women in the economy more extensively. Providing entrepreneurial

opportunities to women at local, national and regional levels will allow them to strengthen their role in society, increase their involvement in education and ultimately allow them to play a more active part in decision-making. As the French social theorist Charles Fourier said more than 200 years ago, "The extension of women's rights is the basic principle of all social progress."

The challenge of climate change, if not addressed, threatens not only the MDGs but also the economic and social stability of our world. We have to achieve, in 2009, a new, truly global agreement with ambitious, binding mitigation targets. We also need a much stronger effort on adaptation, where there is a huge deficit between the needs and the actual financing provided. That deficit is exacerbated by the fact that no matter what we do, we are locked in for significant climate change in the next three to four decades, which is going to especially affect the less developed countries. It is an unjust reality that those that are least to blame for the creation of the problem are to suffer most.

Greece is moving to face this challenge. We have signed, this week in New York, agreements with the African Union and the Caribbean Community for the funding of adaptation projects, and we plan to do the same with the Alliance of Small Island States, providing a total of €20 million for the next four years. One might argue that this is just a drop in the adaptation bucket. It is, however, a drop in an empty bucket.

Migration is a critical element in the development of neglected regions, and the United Nations High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development has taken the lead in dramatizing the link. By hosting the third Global Forum on Migration and Development in the fall of 2009, Greece aims to provide a platform on which to explore solutions and initiatives for the benefit of all countries and especially for the immigrants themselves.

As heartbreaking as the suffering of immigrants and refugees often is, nothing can compare to the misery involved in human trafficking. Young women who leave their homes in search of a better livelihood are exploited, brutalized and forced into a life of unspeakable depravity by the traffickers in human misery who are involved in the international sex trade. I say it is time for the international community to say "Enough!" I urge all the members of the United Nations to begin working together forcefully to put an end to this blight on human dignity.

Along with protecting the weak and vulnerable, the United Nations has the responsibility to act forcefully and to protect the world from the kind of fanaticism and extremism that cripples any social programme. Terrorism poses a major threat to the security of our countries, to the stability of our democratic societies and to the rights and freedoms of our citizens. Around the world, whether in Afghanistan or Pakistan, Iraq or Yemen, the international community must show its strong commitment to combating terrorism while protecting human rights and the rule of law.

On regional security, Greece is preparing to assume the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) next January. The OSCE — the world's largest regional security organization — can be a forum for frank and fruitful talks on security issues and can contribute effectively to such crucial concerns as early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. Finland, the current Chair, has made a major effort to promote positive discussions among the OSCE States, and Greece intends to continue that policy and try to resolve outstanding issues.

The crisis in South Ossetia has created a volatile situation that affects stability in all the South Caucasus and has exacerbated international tension. Greece's position on that crisis is rooted in the principles that have always guided our foreign policy — peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of States. In both the European Union (EU) and NATO, we supported the six-point agreement that helped end conflict in the area, but we are anxious to see measures that will alleviate the anger and mistrust that now pervade the region.

In the broader Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the root of most of the problems, and the region requires a comprehensive and lasting solution. I think that we all agree that the peace process relaunched last year at the Annapolis conference has the potential to achieve tangible results and merits the strong support of all of us.

In Lebanon, we welcome the presidential election, the formation of the National Unity

Government and the resumption of the national dialogue. Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected, in conformity with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Turning to our immediate neighbourhood, Greece is committed to a South-Eastern Europe where all countries belong to the European and Euro-Atlantic families. We were as pleased to welcome Croatia and Albania to NATO a few months ago as we were to welcome Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union last year. We have been encouraged also by the recent developments in Serbia, a country which grows closer to Europe every day.

In the same spirit, we agree with our NATO allies and European Union partners that invitations to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should be extended when a mutually acceptable solution is reached on the name issue. Greece will continue to be guided by the letter and the spirit of Security Council resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993) on that issue, and I want to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, Mr. Matthew Nimetz, for their commitment and their tireless efforts to settle the dispute.

The new reality of Kosovo requires continued attention from the international community. The United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo has done a good job providing security for Kosovo's population, and its successor, the European Union Rule of Law Mission Kosovo, should assume its responsibilities as soon as possible.

Beyond the Western Balkans, Greece continues taking fruitful initiatives in the spirit of international law and the United Nations Charter to broaden and strengthen cooperation with Turkey. We are convinced that modern Turkey, with a clear European orientation, will add to the stability of our region. We therefore support the European aspirations of Turkey as it moves to meet the prerequisites set out in the negotiating framework of the European Union. But words must be matched with deeds. The principles of good-neighbourly relations and peaceful settlement of disputes with other nations are essential preconditions. Yet 34 years after the 1974 invasion of Cyprus, a sovereign United Nations and European Union member State, Turkey continues to occupy over one third of the island's territory with nearly 40,000 troops. That unacceptable situation is a flagrant violation of international law, a threat to the security and welfare of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots alike, and a serious obstacle to the stabilization of the region.

Greece has consistently supported Cyprus in its natural and justified desire to see the withdrawal of all occupation forces as part of a settlement for its reunification as a bizonal, bicommunal federation with intercommunal equality, a single sovereignty, a single citizenship and a single international persona. Relevant United Nations resolutions and principles exist to provide the framework for a mutually acceptable solution.

We thus welcomed the recent decision by Cypriot President Dimitris Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat to resume negotiations under the auspices of the Secretary-General. We believe that a viable solution can be achieved by the Cypriots themselves through negotiations between the two communities without artificial deadlines and arbitration. We shall continue to do everything possible to facilitate a settlement, and we hope that Turkey will also demonstrate flexibility and goodwill towards that end.

As is obvious to all of us, the United Nations is once again beset by a host of troubles that will require the patience of Job to endure and the strength of Hercules to confront. As individual States, we have no hope of marshalling the strength to contemplate, let alone battle, the dangers facing us. But together, through the United Nations, we can find the resolve not only to confront those awesome challenges but to subdue the threat that they pose for humankind.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Esaw, Minister of State, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of Togo.

Mr. Esaw (Togo) (*spoke in French*): Allow me first of all to congratulate Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. He can count on the full cooperation of the Togolese as he carries out his noble task. We would also like to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for the insight and determination which he has demonstrated in leading the Organization since taking up his post.

At the high-level meeting on Africa's development needs, held here on 22 September,

Member States noted that despite the efforts that have been made, the situation in Africa demands continued serious consideration by the international community in order to help Africa face up to the many challenges it faces. It was also stressed that the fight against poverty and the fight for sustainable development cannot succeed without considerable official development assistance and fairer trade between nations.

In that regard, it is unfortunate that the North-South dialogue has been exhausted, as evidenced by the recent failure of the World Trade Organization negotiations in Geneva. Indeed, while international trade should become a tool for development, the balance of global economic power, which was responsible to a great degree for the dependence of countries of the South on their partners in the North, will continue to deteriorate. Most countries perceive globalization as the status quo, which makes the objectives of development and social justice even more difficult to achieve. To think that, when the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in 2000, many of us were hopeful that they would be achieved. For that reason we call upon the international community, especially the countries of the North, to respect the commitments made.

We note with concern that today new and even greater challenges are being added to the long list of those which our States already face. The sharp rise in the price of oil and other raw materials, as well as the increasing demand for energy, along with the effects of the global food and financial crises are among these new challenges.

The current food crisis will not fail to have catastrophic consequences if aid to agriculture is not reviewed and increased; it is unfortunate that such assistance was cut by half between 1992 to 2000. It should also be stressed that few resources have been allocated to agricultural infrastructure, to irrigation and to supplying water to the population.

We venture to hope that the new partnership established on 4 June in Rome between the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme will contribute to an appropriate response to the situation.

Togo has suffered the negative effects of a long political and economic crisis. However, since President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé's accession to power in May 2005, the Togolese Government has sought suitable solutions to the major concerns of the Togolese people by implementing a pragmatic policy based on national reconciliation, poverty reduction and strengthening democracy and the rule of law.

In that context, the head of State worked to conclude a comprehensive political agreement in August 2006, which was signed by the major political parties and which opened the way for the holding of legislative elections in October 2007. There is little need to remind members that those elections took place in a peaceful, transparent and safe environment. They led to the establishment of a broad-based Government and a pluralistic National Assembly, which shows the commitment of the head of State to strengthen the democratization process in an atmosphere of understanding and national unity.

We would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our thanks to the friendly countries and multilateral partners that have fully resumed their cooperation with Togo following the implementation of the agreements signed. In order to consolidate that commitment process, the Togolese Government is working tirelessly to see through the institutional and constitutional reforms provided for by the comprehensive political agreement.

In the legal field, it has undertaken to modernize the justice system, so as to guarantee its independence. In the same vein, national consultations aimed at establishing a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission were launched on 15 April 2008. The Commission will be charged with shedding light on acts of political violence committed in the past and finding ways to compensate the victims. The results of those consultations have just been submitted to the head of State.

Similarly, in its search for better strategies to fight corruption and improve good economic governance, Togo recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the African Peer Review Mechanism, by which it agrees to submit to periodic reviews by the other members of the African Union (AU) and to be directed by the jointly adopted parameters for political, economic and financial governance in Africa. As part of the financial reform,

soon the post of auditor-general and a national audit office will be set up. A Government audit programme is in the process of being finalized.

The torrential rainfall that struck our country last July sorely tested our Government's efforts. It led to countless human injuries and material and financial losses, including the collapse of a dozen bridges, the flooding of railways and the destruction of roads, villages and fields. That disaster, the second of its kind in a year, makes it very difficult to move from region to region.

The solidarity shown to our country enabled us to assist the affected and to start rebuilding some of the infrastructure. Here, I should like to express our deep gratitude to Ghana, Benin, France, China, the United States of America, Brazil and all the other countries, organizations and institutions that helped us.

As members can see, in spite of our efforts the overall situation in our country is far from satisfactory. Therefore, our country deserves more substantial support. In that regard, the positive results of the Togo Development Partners Conference, held in Brussels on 18 and 19 September, leads us to hope that the international community is ready to play a decisive role in assisting our country to get back on its feet.

We would like once again to express our profound thanks to all those who contributed to the success of that conference, in particular the European Union, France, Germany, the United States of America, Portugal, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, the Niger, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Islamic Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Central Bank of West African States, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

For decades, Togolese diplomacy has worked to strengthen friendship and cooperation among States and peoples. Thus, at both the bilateral and the multilateral levels, Togo has always done its utmost to achieve the peaceful settlement of disputes with the purpose of maintaining peace and stability wherever threatened. Those actions, undertaken through dialogue and consultation, are part of the efforts made by African countries to ensure better living conditions for their populations. Togo believes that dialogue and consultation must be the preferred ways to settle ethnic, religious or territorial disputes, which are true obstacles to harmonious coexistence among States and peoples.

Along those lines, it must be recalled that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is at the core of the political and security problems in the Middle East, continues to be the focus of the highest concern for the international community. In order to promote peace and stability in that region, the international community must make a greater effort to find a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

In that regard, Togo welcomes the ongoing dialogue between the parties and hopes that the various initiatives will lead to a comprehensive solution, based on the principle of two States, Israeli and Palestinian, living within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Afghanistan and Iraq, which are experiencing a major lack of security, deserve special attention. We therefore call on the international community to increase its assistance to the Governments of those countries in their fight against terrorism, so as to promote peace and reconstruction.

In Africa, while it is true that glimmers of hope are to be seen in the settlement of crises, one cannot but condemn situations such as those persisting in Darfur and Somalia. We call on the various actors to demonstrate more courage and political will to get out of the vicious circle of violence and, thus, give peace a chance.

Because of the orientation of its foreign policy, the Togolese Government endorses all initiatives aimed at preventing, fighting and eliminating the causes of conflict, in particular the trafficking of and illegal trade in small arms. For that reason, it did not hesitate to support the proposal to draft and adopt a binding international instrument on the trade in small arms. Along those same lines, Togo was involved in activities linked to promoting and safeguarding international peace and security, as demonstrated by its participation in the various peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, the African Union and ECOWAS.

Today more than ever, the world needs security and peace in order to devote its energies to eliminating hunger, illiteracy and disease. To that end, it is more urgent than ever to make concerted efforts to fight inequality, injustice and exclusion.

In our respective countries, we must build societies where humanism and solidarity will reign in peace and security. We believe that that is one of the purposes of the founders of the United Nations and which we must strive to achieve now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency The Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon, MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon (Trinidad and Tobago): I am honoured to be afforded the opportunity to address the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I also wish to extend my sincere congratulations to Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann on his election to the presidency. I am convinced that his wealth of experience, garnered over the years in the different capacities in which he has served and his strong conviction of the importance of multilateralism and respect for international law, will be brought to bear in a most positive and productive way on the proceedings of the session. Further, Trinidad and Tobago is gratified that Nicaragua and, by extension, Central America, has been graced with the distinct honour of guiding the work of the sixty-third session.

At the same time, my delegation wishes to express our heartfelt appreciation and admiration for the way in which His Excellency Srgjan Kerim of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia conducted the affairs of the General Assembly during the last session.

The Secretary-General must be commended, particularly for his untiring efforts in ensuring that humanitarian relief is brought to thousands of victims of natural disasters, including in the Caribbean. Given the increasing frequency and ferocity of hurricanes and other similar climatic phenomena, there is dire need for the provision of early warning systems and capacity-building programmes in vulnerable regions like the Caribbean, aimed at enhancing planning and preparedness and at mitigating the effects of such disasters. We applaud all efforts to bring relief to those affected.

The President returned to the Chair.

The recent disasters bring into sharp focus the imperative of purposeful action on the problems of climate change at the national, regional and international levels. Trinidad and Tobago is committed to adopting concrete measures aimed at reducing its levels of greenhouse gas emissions, while at the same time promoting balanced industrialization and environmental sustainability.

Notwithstanding its current healthy endowment of hydrocarbon resources, Trinidad and Tobago recognizes the need to promote clean energy alternatives, the development of new and renewable energy options and the proper protection and management of the nation's forests. Indeed, the Government is putting into effect appropriate policies for substantial results in that area. We hope to achieve meaningful progress, in cooperation with development partners within the public and private sectors, both locally and internationally, and with civil society.

Cooperation at the international level is also indispensable to efforts aimed at addressing the current energy crisis. Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to partner with its African friends in order to, among other things, identify ways of developing long-term strategies for the sustainable development and utilization of their energy resources. That is in keeping with the pledge made by The Honourable Patrick Manning, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in 2007, when he addressed the eighth Summit of the African Union, in Ethiopia. Since then, discussions have ensued with individual African States and with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to advance the initiative. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is eager to work assiduously towards the attainment of our common objectives.

Trinidad and Tobago firmly believes that the United Nations must take the lead in the management of the global food crisis, in which we are confronted with a situation of losing thousands to hunger on an almost daily basis. We embrace the various multilateral initiatives to address that grave challenge, including the establishment by the Secretary-General of the High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis in April 2008 and the adoption of its Comprehensive Framework for Action.

The eradication of extreme poverty and hunger is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to be achieved by 2015. We cannot allow the threat posed by the global food crisis to reverse the strides made so far by many developing countries to achieve that Goal. We must utilize all the resources at our disposal, including a recommitment to the Food and Agriculture

Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which was established to help developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture and fisheries practices and to ensure good nutrition for their citizens. We must work in concert to provide that institution with the resources necessary to discharge effectively its mandates. If we fail to win the war against that common enemy, we will be compromising the right to food and by extension the right to life of millions of people.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has embraced a number of key policy initiatives that are designed to guarantee our citizens access to food of sufficient quality and quantity and to reduce the impact of the food crisis. Thousands of acres have been made available for diversified agricultural production. In addition, capital is accessible to farmers through our national Agricultural Development Bank.

Trinidad and Tobago recognizes that food security must also be pursued in the context of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy, which provides the opportunity for the integration of production and cross-border investment in agricultural production in those countries which have greater agricultural potential and resources. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago therefore hosted, jointly with the CARICOM secretariat and the Food and Agriculture Organization, a regional agriculture donor conference in June 2007.

Similarly, like poverty and hunger, terrorism remains a major scourge on our societies and poses a direct threat to democratic institutions. It undermines the rule of law, infringes human rights and generally affects the well-being of its victims. Trinidad and Tobago is convinced that members of the international community must embrace multilateral solutions in the fight against terrorism. We remain committed to the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which is complementary to our own efforts to combat terrorism.

Trinidad and Tobago views the reform of the Security Council as indispensable to the transformation and further democratization of the United Nations. As a small island developing State, Trinidad and Tobago wishes to reiterate its position on Security Council reform, which emphasizes the need for, among other things, equity of access for small States to the Security Council and the need for representation of all regions of the world in its permanent membership. Failure to reform the Security Council could serve to undermine that organ's authority as the body with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, as well as its ability to discharge its other obligations under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

Trinidad and Tobago is convinced that the United Nations remains the principal vehicle for meaningful exchanges between members of the international community on matters of international concern. Such deliberations, in our view, constitute the bedrock of the democratization of the United Nations system and are for us a priority consideration. We recognize therefore the great value of the informal consultations on system-wide coherence aimed at making the Organization deliver as one.

Further progress on that issue during the current session is imperative for the United Nations development system to be able to provide Member States, particularly developing countries, with the assistance required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the other internationally agreed development goals.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has charted a development policy to achieve the MDGs within the stipulated period, as well as to transform the country to developed status by the year 2020. The pace of economic growth over the past decade has fortunately enabled us to surpass MDG targets in achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, empowering women and significantly reducing the level of poverty.

Trinidad and Tobago's development strategy exceeds the MDG targets in some respects. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been able to provide free secondary and tertiary education to its citizens. In addition, 30 per cent of our cabinet ministers and members of parliament are women.

Regrettably, for many developing States, the achievement of the MDGs within the stipulated period appears to be elusive. We therefore urge all development partners to honour their commitments and pledges already agreed upon.

Another important international process to which Trinidad and Tobago attaches great importance is the review of the implementation of the Monterrey

Consensus on Financing for Development, which will be addressed at a follow-up international conference in Doha, Qatar, in November. The Monterrey Consensus, adopted by heads of State or Government in 2002, called for the mobilization of resources to assist developing countries in meeting the MDGs and recognized the importance of coherence and consistency within and among the international monetary, financial and trading systems in support of overall development. While there have been some advances under the key pillars of financing for development, they have not been sufficiently far-reaching. In the light of the current financial crisis, the timing for the convening of the follow-up conference is most timely and presents an opportunity for the forging of global partnerships in a spirit of solidarity. A key component for success will be an ongoing engagement between Governments and all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society.

Trinidad and Tobago is committed to the regional integration movement of CARICOM and has continued to provide economic assistance to our CARICOM partners within the ambit of that multilateral framework and other bilateral arrangements. One such arrangement is Trinidad and Tobago's Petroleum Development Fund, a facility that only recently was drawn upon to provide substantial assistance to some of our Caribbean neighbours in the aftermath of recent hurricanes. Another is the CARICOM Trade Support Programme, a comprehensive loan facility of $16.5 million that is aimed at improving the trade capacity of CARICOM States by providing assistance in the diversification of their economies and in improving trade capacity.

The Caribbean also falls prey to the nefarious trade in narcotics, to which the illegal proliferation of small arms and light weapons is linked. In an effort to confront these challenges, we have concluded with our neighbours the CARICOM Maritime and Air Space Security Cooperation Agreement to protect our borders from illegal activities. We recognize, however, the important role of the United Nations as the premier multilateral forum in providing assistance in areas such as capacity-building to augment our own resources. For the States of the Caribbean, a critical aspect of disarmament is the eradication of the illegal trade in small arms. Trinidad and Tobago therefore calls for urgent action to complete the work on the elaboration of an arms trade treaty.

In the context of our efforts to address the challenge, we also wish to call again for consideration to be given to the inclusion of international drug trafficking as one of the crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

It is of great significance to us that the very year we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute of the ICC, we also commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since its establishment, the ICC has been able to attract 100 States parties, issue arrest warrants and begin trials of persons accused of committing crimes of major concern to the international community. The perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes show flagrant disregard for the human rights of their victims, as well as for human rights law and humanitarian law, none of which should go unpunished.

The United Nations has played a seminal role in the promotion and development of international law, which has contributed to the maintenance of international peace and security and friendly relations among States. As a small State, Trinidad and Tobago views adherence to and respect for the rule of law as a bulwark against intrusions that could affect our territorial integrity, independence and economic development and the general well-being of our citizens. However, we are conscious of the need for international cooperation in the implementation of international legal obligations under various conventions that provide mutual benefits to Member States.

One area of which the United Nations can be justly proud is the conclusion of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Convention has worked well since its adoption and entry into force, and it has provided legal certainty to activities carried out by States in different maritime zones. In keeping with our obligations under the Convention, Trinidad and Tobago is in the process of completing work on its submission to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf by May 2009 to extend its continental shelf jurisdiction beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured. We do so with full respect

for the sovereign right of other coastal States to make similar submissions to the Commission.

Our region is home to the International Seabed Authority, which is located in Jamaica. The Authority's mandate is derived from the Convention, and it is entrusted with the responsibility to administer the resources of the International Seabed Area, which is the common heritage of mankind. As in previous years, we again call on all members of the Authority to make every effort to attend its meetings.

In conclusion, Trinidad and Tobago wishes to reaffirm its faith in and commitment to multilateralism at the regional, hemispheric and international levels. Dialogue among States must always be the preferred option for solving the myriad problems that we face in an increasingly complex international environment. It is in recognition of this importance that Trinidad and Tobago has taken the bold decision to host in 2009 both the Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Dialogue in those two bodies, which are microcosms of the United Nations, could also influence discussions at the United Nations, an institution that we must continue to transform, guard and protect, in order to be able to bequeath it to future generations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gonzalo Fernández, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Eastern Republic of Uruguay.

Mr. Fernández (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Uruguay, one of the founding States of the United Nations, sees the fundamental principles of its foreign policy fully reflected in the Charter of this Organization.

For that reason, we believe it important at the outset to reassert the validity of those principles in the present international context and to emphasize once again the traditional Uruguayan position of full respect for international law, support for multilateralism, peaceful settlement of disputes, sovereign equality of States, rejection of the use or threat of use of force, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States, the self-determination of peoples, the promotion and protection of human rights and international economic and social cooperation.

It is worth repeating that this list is not simply an inventory of good intentions, but of legal principles and fundamental values. Their enshrinement in the Charter of the United Nations gives them the status of international law, to whose validity and enforcement all States must conform.

Furthermore, those principles are crucial guiding tools in a world that presents us today with major challenges. We, nations gathered here, have the moral and legal duty to find suitable solutions that will make peace and development the rule of coexistence for our peoples.

As we all know, a severe food crisis is currently afflicting too many countries throughout the world. If a sustainable and lasting solution in to be found, we must address the structural factors influencing and causing the crisis. Correcting the distortions in the multilateral trade system, in particular in agricultural trade, is certainly a decisive element in ensuring a plentiful supply of food that will meet the needs of the entire population of the planet.

Uruguay believes that, in addition to tackling this serious crisis with urgent measures, we must make progress towards a long-term solution. That inevitably means redoubling our efforts to strengthen the multilateral trade system and swiftly resuming the negotiations in the World Trade Organization. It is essential that we do so, particularly in the area of agriculture, in order to guarantee world food security and to avoid a reversion to protectionist practices that would only further aggravate the situation.

The food crisis is not the only crisis affecting us, however; another major challenge facing the world economy is undoubtedly that of energy. Here, as with agriculture, Latin America requires the technological cooperation of developed countries. Likewise, when it comes to developing the production of alternative energy sources, such as bioenergy and biofuels, research and technical assistance are essential if we are to benefit from the opportunities provided by such production without affecting food security or the environment. The United Nations has a crucially important catalytic role in that regard.

In addition, we cannot overlook the current financial crisis of the major developed countries, which demonstrates the global interconnectedness and interdependence among States. Although developing countries are certainly not the cause of the crisis, its effects afflict and punish the economies of emerging countries.

With regard to the environment and sustainable development, Uruguay is a party to the major international conventions in that area. While we have emphasized the importance of international cooperation, we have also always emphasized the individual responsibility of every State to actively protect the environment in its own territory and waters, and have always valued the vigilant participation of civil society in that regard.

That is why, while we receive significant investments that contribute to our industrial development, my country also exerts rigorous control over the environmental practices of the entities involved, applying internationally recognized standards and requiring the use of the most modern technologies available, with effective control over the environmental impact of those undertakings. The Uruguayan Government thus reaffirms its unwavering commitment to protecting the environment as a human right and as a fundamental component in the achievement of true sustainable development.

Another major issue on the agenda of the General Assembly is the Millennium Development Goals agreed by Member States in September 2000, which Uruguay has fully endorsed. In that context, Uruguay has taken firm steps to achieve the Goals. We need only highlight, among other policies with a significant social content, the recent launching of our comprehensive national health system — aimed at transforming the health-care model by prioritizing primary health care and prevention in order to guarantee a basic right of all citizens — as part of the social inclusion policy that Uruguay is implementing.

Given its strict adherence to international law, Uruguay is also firmly committed to consolidating international peace and security, as demonstrated by its status as one of the 10 major contributors of troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations and as the world's largest contributor per capita in terms of troop numbers. Our country is currently participating in 16 United Nations peacekeeping missions deployed in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe. Since we began to participate in peacekeeping missions, Uruguay has gained experience in matters related to reconstruction and peacebuilding in areas devastated by conflict, making great efforts to put an end to hostilities so that various societies and communities can agree on peace and achieve national reconciliation.

However, as our international experience has taught us, peacekeeping, while essential, is not sufficient to return affected countries to institutional normalcy and an orderly and peaceful life. That is why the strong involvement of the international community is needed in peacekeeping efforts to effectively ensure the building of stable, democratic and prosperous societies through robust institutional mechanisms for resolving their conflicts. For that reason, Uruguay submitted its candidature to the Peacebuilding Commission in February 2007. We hope to be able to contribute to the attainment of those noble objectives in that forum.

The cause of peace requires, in institutional terms, a strengthened and effective Organization. That brings us to the topic of the United Nations reform process. The negotiations in that regard have not proceeded with the scope and speed originally envisaged. Although the two recently established bodies, the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission, have been in existence for a few years, we have not yet been able to move on to Security Council reform — which is essential — and only a few timid steps have been taken in the process of reforming the Secretariat and the General Assembly.

Uruguay reaffirms its support for the process of Security Council reform in the permanent and non-permanent membership categories. However, we will not support the creation of new members with the right of the veto, since we believe that the issue of extending the veto must not be included in the package to be agreed upon in the intergovernmental negotiations. Moreover, in keeping with its traditional position since the founding of the United Nations, our country disapproves of the right of veto, which is a privilege that runs counter to the full democratization of our Organization.

In the area of reform, we also view the One United Nations pilot project in two ways. We see it first as an instrument through which reform of the operational activities of the United Nations system could be put into practice; and secondly, as a cooperative exercise in areas of priority identified by the Uruguayan Government in the context of a national development strategy based on sustained and sustainable economic growth with equity and social justice. However, we understand that the programme should adapt itself to specific national priorities and needs. That is why no single model is applicable to all

pilot countries, given their inherent differences from one another.

I also wish to refer to a topic of particular relevance for Uruguay — the situation of so-called middle-income countries. Those countries find themselves in a paradoxical situation. Although there are certain indicators of economic growth, negative circumstances that hinder sustainable and sustained growth in the medium- and long-terms have not been taken into account, nor has it been possible to prevent dramatic erosion of some of the progress made. In particular and with dramatic effect, the well-known clear vulnerability of the economies of developing countries in a globalized world economy subjects them to the effects of external crises with clear, direct consequences, such as rising poverty and inequity in income distribution, as well as strengthened migratory trends, to mention just some effects that Uruguay has experienced directly.

Finally, in affirming its unwavering commitment to the fight against terrorism, Uruguay reiterates its rejection of all terrorist acts and vigorously condemns all attacks against civil populations and public infrastructure, the destruction of which adversely affects the civil population. Terrorism must be unequivocally condemned and cooperation between States must increase in order to ensure that such acts do not go unpunished.

We must be careful, however. The fight against terrorism must always be waged based on the rule of law, and consequently in the strictest respect for the standards of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The same applies to drug trafficking. Our country has continued its unrelenting fight against illegal drug trafficking. Our effort targets both supply and demand. Thanks to that policy and beyond our success in stamping out the illicit traffic in those substances, our country has been at the vanguard of our continent in terms of its policies to prevent consumption and treat those affected by drugs.

Both terrorism and drug trafficking severely compromise the full enjoyment of human rights, the safeguarding of which has been one of the strategic policies of the current Government. We want respect for human rights to be more than routine rhetoric; it should enjoy full expression in the daily life of its citizens. On that basis, our country has prioritized strengthening legislation and the competent national bodies, and has sought to extend international human rights and to consolidate institutions that effectively protect and secure the international enjoyment of human rights and prevent their violation. In short, the protection of human rights is one of the central axes of the Republic's foreign policy and is without a doubt Uruguay's basic political institutional asset.

As is evident, the effective protection of human rights calls for a strong jurisdictional body to guarantee its application. In that context, the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was a fundamental contribution to the progressive development of international law and an event of tremendous legal and political importance. In 2006, Uruguay enacted a national law pledging full cooperation with the ICC. Respectfully, we urge the international community as a whole to do the same in order to prevent genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity from going unpunished.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that, with conflicts threatening peace and international security and taking into account the growing interdependence of States as a result of globalization, it is now crucial to emphatically reaffirm the relevance of the United Nations as the lead body and ultimate multilateral forum for finding appropriate solutions to today's major global challenges.

The pursuit of multilateralism therefore implies a search for collective responses to international conflicts and problems, in accordance with international law and in the framework of the principles of the United Nations Charter, which regulates peaceful coexistence between nations. Indeed, we must uphold the ideals that inspired the establishment of the Organization. That is a civilizing project that we cannot abandon as it represents unfinished business that we owe it to ourselves and to generations to come to complete.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Karel Schwarzenberg, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Mr. Schwarzenberg (Czech Republic): Let me begin by extending my congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the important function of President of the General Assembly. You will steer the deliberations of this key body of the United Nations through a

difficult period of growing challenges to our common security and prosperity. Let me assure you of our full support in your endeavours. I also thank your predecessor, Mr. Kerim.

My country is in full preparation for an enormous task that has no precedent in our history. In January 2009, the Czech Republic will assume the responsibility of the presidency of the European Union. We will do our utmost to uphold our shared commitment to world peace and prosperity within that organization.

The European Union stands at the forefront of the efforts to strengthen the United Nations capacity to deliver effective international responses to global challenges. The Czech Republic is committed to playing its part and to further enhancing the European Union's contribution by searching for common responses. The motto of the upcoming Czech presidency, "Europe without barriers", reflects our desire to promote the removal of barriers not only within the European Union, but also between the Union and third countries. In our opinion, it is very much in line with the efforts to enhance cooperation and to strengthen the principle of effective multilateralism.

The agreements reached at the 2005 World Summit sparked some substantive reforms, but the process has reached a point at which it has become necessary to give it a new impulse for further progress. An important part of that progress is Security Council reform. A more representative and transparent Security Council will act with a greater international legitimacy and authority. The Czech Republic therefore welcomes the recent decision to launch the intergovernmental negotiations. However, the authority of the Security Council is being undermined by its inability to address some acute international issues. I call on the Council to reassert its authority in the maintenance of international peace and security and to shoulder its obligations.

The authority of the United Nations is being tested, and so are our political and moral responsibilities. By signing onto the Charter of the United Nations, all of our countries have committed themselves to living in peace and harmony and to respecting the principles of peaceful resolution of disputes and of refraining from the threat and use of force, except in self-defence. Today, as security is being challenged in too many parts of the world, those basic principles, and the system of international law in general, need to be upheld as ever.

And yet, we have recently witnessed systematic provocations and, finally, a military aggression on the part of a powerful country, a permanent member of the Security Council, against its small neighbour with the aim of carving that neighbour up. That action was designed to create two tiny entities, totally dependent in their administrative, economic and military structures. Colonial Powers used to act in that way, and I would like to stress that alleged interests, privileged as they may be considered, cannot justify the violation of our highest common principles, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nation. Therefore, I fully subscribe to the words pronounced by Sergey Lavrov here earlier today:

> "We cannot tolerate any attempts to resolve conflict situations by violating international agreements or by the unlawful use of force. If we allow that to occur once, then we run the risk of unleashing it in the future" (*A/63/PV.14*).

However, how can one think of redesigning new Euro-Atlantic security structures without renewing the trust that has vanished over the past few months?

After the Czech Republic sent substantial humanitarian aid, it initiated an international support conference for Georgia, to be held next month in Brussels. We call upon the international community to help alleviate the suffering of the tens of thousands of people displaced by the conflict, as well as to help the country with post-conflict reconstruction. We insist that all internally displaced persons return home. The immediate task is to ensure that all military forces are withdrawn to pre-war positions. There is urgent need for the deployment of an international and impartial mission in Georgia to oversee the military withdrawals and ceasefire implementation. Let me stress once again, however, that a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict must be based on full respect for the principle of Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We need to step up efforts to combat international terrorism. The stakes remain high. With our deep condolences to the peoples of India and Pakistan, we strongly condemn the recent terrorist attacks in New Delhi and Islamabad. We must not be shaken, but must stand up to that scourge united, stronger and more determined. I was deeply moved by the condolences

expressed by my Pakistani counterpart. It is touching to hear that from someone whose country has suffered immensely from terrorism.

Promoting and maintaining international security requires concerted action. While there is a need for strengthened United Nations peacekeeping capacity, other organizations can effectively complement the work of the United Nations in areas where they have a comparative advantage.

We have all felt the pains of stabilizing a war-torn country like Afghanistan. Despite the persisting lack of security, the international community continues to support development even in remote areas. By establishing and running the provincial reconstruction team in Logar province, my country has undertaken a long-term commitment to contribute to the security and development of Afghanistan. Let me express our full support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan, Ambassador Kai Eide, and invite the United Nations to take a more active approach and enhance its involvement and assistance to Afghanistan. The Afghans need our support to turn President Karzai's words, "we must do what it takes to win the battle of Afghanistan's economic development" (*A/63/PV.7*), into reality. A concerted effort between the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations and other key international players, including Pakistan, is a prerequisite to achieving that goal.

The cooperation of the United Nations, the European Union and NATO needs to continue to the benefit of the Balkan region as a whole. Looking into the future, let me assure Members that both democratic and prosperous Serbia and Kosovo do have a place in the European family and that the Czech Republic is ready to lend them a helping hand. We in the Czech Republic have always had long-standing and traditionally close and friendly relations with Serbia and are keen to develop them further.

The recent arrest and transfer of Radovan Karadzic to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was a promising sign of cooperation of the new Serbian Government with the international community. I call on the Security Council to provide sufficient time to the Tribunal for the completion of its work.

The Czech Republic considers international criminal justice to be one of the pillars that uphold the basic values of the United Nations. The ad hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, as well as the Security Council decision of 2005 to refer the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court, must be supported in order to end impunity for the most serious crimes. Let me recall the Secretary-General's commitment at the opening of this general debate: "We have the means to combat impunity and must therefore do so" (*A/63/PV.5, p. 3*).

We need to undertake some bold steps in the area of weapons of mass destruction and non-proliferation. We should reduce the risk of those weapons being misused or falling into the hands of terrorists. The immediate task is to ensure a successful outcome of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons review process and the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

In that context, I would like to express our concern over the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programmes. We fully recognize the indispensable right of every country to exploit nuclear power for civilian purposes, but we should act when it could be diverted towards military purposes, in breach of international commitments.

My country was among those that has vigorously called for a new universal norm to prevent risks stemming from the use of cluster munitions. The Czech Republic will be among the first to sign the new Convention on Cluster Munitions this December. I am convinced that the more countries that join the Convention, the more profound and positive the effect it will have on the lives of countless individuals and communities.

Security goes hand in hand with development and human rights. In the sixtieth year of the existence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is still a long way to go from the merely formal commitments of Governments to achieving a universally shared respect for the rights and liberties of every human being.

In recent years, the United Nations human rights institutions have undergone long-awaited reform. However, our goals have been only partially achieved. Let me express my deep regret that the Human Rights Council has been unable to tackle several serious human rights situations in a timely and proper manner. Although the Council is putting meritorious effort into the newly established Universal Periodic Review mechanism, the political imbalance of its agenda and

the attempts to weaken the role of special procedures and non-governmental organizations further diminish the expectations of reform. Moreover, flouting the appeals of the international community, as was done by the Myanmar regime, has to be denounced.

The Czech Republic supports the principle of responsibility to protect formulated at the 2005 World Summit. The international community has the responsibility to protect peoples worldwide in cases where their Governments are unable or unwilling to do so. Just over the past few years, we have seen some quite tragic examples desperately requiring our attention. I therefore welcome the Secretary-General's efforts to advance that issue. A valuable contribution can also be made through the non-governmental initiatives of leaders such as Václav Havel, Kjell Magne Bondevik and Elie Wiesel. Earlier this week, I had the honour to host an event in New York aimed at presenting their thoughts and recommendations on the tragic human rights and humanitarian situation in North Korea.

This week, I took part in high-level meetings on Africa's development needs and on the Millennium Development Goals. We have already witnessed early successes and setbacks, and we realize that some goals are more difficult to achieve than others. Now, at the halfway point to the target date, we are well aware of how much needs to be done in the remaining seven years. Our commitment to development, and notably to Africa, must not wane.

At the end of this year, the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development will present an opportunity to review the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus of 2002. The conclusion of the ongoing talks on the Doha Development Agenda within the World Trade Organization should also bring the tangible benefits of further trade liberalization for developing countries. To make that happen, the European Union has already shown the necessary flexibility. Other key actors have to follow suit if the talks are to get back on track and be concluded soon. In that context, let me recall once again the Czech presidency's motto, "Europe without barriers".

Let me assure the Assembly that the Czech Republic fully supports the European Union (EU) commitments to intensify EU development assistance. The Czech presidency of the Union will be yet another incentive for us to step up our development assistance.

Soaring food and commodity prices, as well as the negative impact of climate change, hamper international development. All those issues require strong political will. The new legal framework to reduce greenhouse gas emissions beyond 2012 is one of the most important issues. The Czech Republic is fully aware of the need to make significant progress towards the adoption of a new post-Kyoto agreement. The Czech presidency of the European Union will play an active role in that process, which will culminate in Copenhagen next year, where a new agreement should be adopted.

I have outlined just a few points that are awaiting our action. In many areas, time is running out. I would like to encourage all Members of this universal Organization to cooperate in our common efforts to make this world secure and prosperous. The Czech Republic is committed to doing its part.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Rais Yatim, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

Mr. Yatim (Malaysia): The Malaysian delegation congratulates you, Mr. President, on your election as the president of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session.

We are in a situation of unprecedented crisis. The skyrocketing prices of fuel and food have caused us distress and widespread hardship. Beyond that, the current financial and climate crises continue to tear the social fabric of Member States. To term it merely an economic crisis is to understate the case. Indeed, the sheer complexity and connectivity between food, fuel and energy, between finance and climate change, make the task of addressing those convergent crises so bedevilling.

It is here at the United Nations that the crises must be faced and resolved. If we fail to address and remedy those calamities, our role and responsibility in this body will be called into question.

Some have called the current situation, particularly the food crisis, a silent tsunami. I beg to differ. It has not been and is not silent. Instead, the rumblings have been heard for some time, most particularly in Africa. In 1974, the international community gathered in Rome to address the global

food crisis, and in 1996, again in Rome, we dedicated ourselves at the World Food Summit to eliminating hunger and malnutrition and to achieving sustainable food security for all.

We adopted seven commitments towards that end. It was estimated in 1974 that, if action was not taken, there could be 680 million hungry people in the world in 2010. The latest figure shows that, at present, 850 million people face hunger on a daily basis. Clearly, we have failed to take heed of the warnings made 34 years ago. Can we now ask what happened to those resolutions that we made?

Liberalization has fundamentally changed the market structure for food and energy sources. Those changes have allowed for greater international speculation. A clear evidence of speculation on the price of food can be found in the dramatic rise in prices. An increase of close to 40 per cent has been recorded within a six-month period, in some cases. In view of the volatility of food prices, Malaysia strongly supports efforts to promote agriculture and food production.

It is generally assumed that rising food prices automatically benefit all farmers equally. That is not the case. Due to the concentrated and vertically integrated nature of the global food trade, a good number of agribusiness companies control all aspects of cultivation and distribution. We are therefore now witnessing smallholders being squeezed out. They are unable to benefit from rising prices. At the same time, ironically, many have to purchase food items that are available in the market at very high prices.

The energy crisis has some of the same causes as the food situation. Underinvestment is one of those causes. Expectations of continued ample supply have been dashed due to speculation and increased demand. The causes of the fuel, food and climate change crises clearly lie in the unfulfilled hopes and broken promises of sustainable development. In Rio almost a decade and a half ago, the human family agreed that we would undertake concerted action to address the sustainable development challenge based, inter alia, on the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

Yet, we are facing a crisis that could have catastrophic consequences. It would appear that we have not learned the lessons of history or avoided the habit of producing resolution after resolution minus the requisite pursuit and follow-up. Indeed, that is the root cause of our stagnation in many areas of the Organization's responsibilities.

Therefore, the question is: what needs to be done? Allow me to make six suggestions.

First, the international community, in particular the developed world, should demonstrate greater political commitment. The focus of the countries of the developed world should be on fulfilling their 2008-2012 commitments and, in so doing, setting a standard for the entire world, rather than on trying to pass the burden of action on to the developing world.

Secondly, we must find the right mix in balancing the competing interests of the three pillars of sustainable development, namely, economic growth, social development and environmental protection.

Thirdly, the optimal mix between governmental and private-sector action must be found. Clearly, market forces and the private sector have a role to play in overcoming these convergent crises. However, the role of the Government is critical in terms of providing policy integration as well as balancing the competing interests of the three pillars of sustainable development.

Fourthly, further infrastructure development and the transfer of technology are critical elements in overcoming the present crises.

Fifthly, we must resolve long-standing issues that lie at the heart of world geopolitics today. In particular, we must resolve the problems in the world's most volatile regions — which, coincidentally, are some of the world's largest producers and distribution channels of oil. The United Nations must make a forward thrust in meeting the need for peace and security. Energy and food are truly needs of humanity. Therefore, the United Nations must introduce a synergy of human rights into the matter so that oil and food become basic rights of humanity.

And sixthly, long-term solutions must be found in order to stabilize the price of commodities. More particularly, the futures market must be organized and duly regulated so that it becomes a force of stability, not volatility, in prices. That must be coupled with continued research and development related to alternative energy, be it solar, nuclear or derivative fuel.

Malaysia recognizes certain realities. In the face of vehement protests, we have taken measures to reduce the level of fuel subsidies, which could have been untenable in the long run. We have also undertaken measures to reduce Government spending and to promote greater energy efficiency. Last July, leaders of the Developing 8 Countries, of which Malaysia is now Chair, agreed in Kuala Lumpur to make serious efforts to cooperate in increasing agricultural production and achieving greater food security. We urge the countries of the developed world to play their rightful greater role in addressing those convergent crises, given their greater wealth and capacities.

The present financial crisis being suffered by the United States threatens to engulf the entire world, although the vast majority of us did not enjoy the benefits when times were good. Somehow, the financial mantra of the United States has lost its magic. Casting our minds back to the Asian financial crisis in 1997, we cannot help but compare the scenarios. The troubles of Asian companies then were the result of outside forces, while the present troubles of United States financial companies are entirely of their own doing. It must be asked: why were the actions taken by the Governments of Asia — in particular, that of Malaysia — to save our own companies a decade ago deemed so wrong, while the present bailout of United States financial companies is deemed to be right? To ensure that such a debacle does not recur, let us today resolve to check the excesses of the so-called financial wizards whose alchemy has resulted in so much suffering. Malaysia supports the view that corporate captains should not sap their entities by receiving unbelievably high pay packages.

New threats to peace and security continue to pose additional challenges for the international community. Terrorism, transnational crime and piracy are but a few of the challenges that confront us. Already, the scourge of terrorism and piracy in international waters has taken its toll on many States. Malaysia, Japan and even Russia have become victims to acts of piracy thousands of miles away from their shores.

Just days ago, in August 2008, two Malaysian vessels were hijacked by pirates in the Gulf of Aden. Sixty-five Malaysians and 15 Filipinos on board those vessels are being held hostage in Somalia. In order to secure the release of the hostages and ensure the safe navigation of our vessels in that area, Malaysia has taken steps in accordance with Security Council resolution 1816 (2008) and international law. My delegation stands ready to work closely with other States that share the same predicament. We urge the Security Council to immediately address the problem in an effective manner. My delegation also calls on States, particularly the littoral States in the region, to provide the means necessary to ensure the security of navigation in their waters.

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are three important pillars of our political life. Those pillars, enshrined in the Malaysian Constitution, have bequeathed to us freedom and liberty, dignity and harmony, peace and security. Malaysia will protect and strengthen those sacrosanct pillars at all costs in order to ensure that all members of our multireligious and multi-ethnic society can continue to live with one another in peace, harmony and unity, while respecting diversity. We believe that good and harmonious relations among our various religious and ethnic groups are our greatest asset. We respect the rule of law, and no one is above the law.

Malaysia is concerned over recent attempts by certain powerful Member States to question the national laws of countries and the administration of justice under those laws. It needs to be restated: we have no right to meddle — in any form or manifestation, or under any pretext or circumstances — in the conduct of the internal affairs of other countries. If we so chose, we could question the legal basis of the Guantánamo detentions without trial, but we have not done so, inasmuch as we do not question societal behaviour in other jurisdictions. While same-sex fornication and marriage are acceptable in California, that does not mean that sodomy — which is a crime in many countries in Asia — is to be impugned or derided.

Let us remind ourselves of the purposes and principles set out in the United Nations Charter, as well as of the relevant provisions of the 2000 Millennium Declaration and the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, which should be defended and upheld.

Democracy in Malaysia remains very vibrant and progressive. Basic rights continue to be guaranteed for each and every Malaysian citizen, and the rule of law via parliament remains central to our existence as a sovereign and independent nation.

It is here in the General Assembly that the entire world comes together in a true spirit of common resolve and partnership. That presupposes the creation of an international order and a reformed United Nations that reflect not only the current and future realities, but also our resolve in fulfilling each and every resolution that we have adopted here at the Assembly.

Indeed, it would be elementary at this juncture to answer the question: to what extent have we fulfilled and satisfied the numerous resolutions that we have adopted over the decades? Indeed, what happens to the speeches after speeches that leaders have made? Lest we be blamed as a mere resolution-producing body, let us begin to act in concert to deliver the goods that we all should have delivered for the sake of the very humanity that we are charged with safeguarding. Let us plan the work and subsequently work the plan.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Pak Kil Yon, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Mr. Pak Kil Yon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text provided by the delegation*): At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, allow me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. I also wish to express confidence that, under your able stewardship, the current session will be a success.

It is a centuries-long aspiration of mankind to live in a peaceful and prosperous world, free from war and domination. Nearly 10 years have passed since the General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2), reflecting that common desire. Nevertheless, a vicious circle of aggression and intervention, conflict and terrorism still persists within international relations, and, consequently, global peace and security continue to face serious new challenges.

The military alliances in place throughout the cold war era are being further intensified, and arms races in new forms are taking place in the Asia-Pacific, European and other regions. Attempts to justify violations of the sovereignty of developing countries under the pretext of human rights, non-proliferation and the war on terror go ever-more undisguised. Disparities in wealth and imbalances in the level of development between the North and the South have become further deepened, foreshadowing gloomy prospects for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in developing countries. The ever-worsening energy, food and financial crises of recent days are seriously affecting the already vulnerable economies of developing countries.

Today's realities require all Member States to pool their efforts for the building of a just, peaceful and prosperous world as a matter of priority, as they pledged in the Millennium Declaration.

The building of a new world, free and peaceful, without domination, subjugation, aggression or war is a common aspiration of the world's peoples and is now the shared responsibility of humankind. Ongoing efforts to reform the United Nations and enhance its role should be directed towards that end. It is also imperative to hold in check the attempts of some individual countries to address critical international issues related to world peace and security solely with a view to their own interests. For that purpose, there is a need to decisively enhance the authority of the General Assembly, in which all Member States exercise their equal rights.

Aggression and interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States and acts committed under the cover of human rights protection should be completely rejected. Today, the worst peace-breaker and human rights violator in the world is none other than the United States, as evidenced by its armed invasion of sovereign countries and its unhesitating massacre of innocent civilians.

Human rights are sovereign and independent rights. We urge Member States to remain vigilant in the face of the constant clamouring by the United States and other Western countries on the subject of human rights protection and not to accept the politicization of, or selectivity and double standards in human rights.

The main reason that the question of relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Japan has been unresolved for over half a century lies in Japan's failure to liquidate its past, which is stained with large-scale crimes. Japan is the only war criminal State that whitewashes the history of aggression and massacre of millions of innocent people in Korea and other Asian countries and today attempts to grab the sacred Tok Islet of Korea. Such a country

should never be permitted to become a permanent member of the Security Council.

No one aspires to peace more than the Korean people, who suffered under Japanese military occupation for almost half a century and since have been in confrontation with the United States for over 60 years. Even now, a series of reckless military manoeuvres destabilizing the region, including through the strengthening of strategic military alliances, massive shipments of state-of-the-art war equipment and annual large-scale military exercises, are being conducted in and around the Korean peninsula.

The Ulji Freedom Guardian joint military exercise, staged by the United States and the Republic of Korea this past August, under the pretext of what they called "Preparation for an emergency on the Korean peninsula", was nothing more than a war drill, for all intents and purposes mounting a pre-emptive nuclear strike on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Double-faced approaches, such as talking about dialogue and resorting to war exercises against a dialogue partner behind the scenes, are a clear indication of the persistently hostile policy of the United States against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the confrontational policy of the present South Korean regime.

In the face of such military threats and danger of war, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has been strengthening in every possible way its self-defence capability in order to safeguard its national sovereignty and peace. That choice and right of ours is just and legitimate and cannot be subject to criticism and blame by others. If the powerful deterrent to war secured by the Songun policy of the respected General Kim Jong Il had not existed, the Korean peninsula would have already suffered catastrophes several times over, which would certainly have led to the complete disruption of regional peace and stability as a whole.

The denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is the lifetime instruction of President Kim Il Sung, the great leader of our people, and the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea remains consistent in its position of resolving the nuclear issue peacefully through dialogue and negotiations. The adoption of the North-South Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in 1992 and of the Agreed Framework between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 1994 are a demonstration of the firm political will of our Government to denuclearize the Korean peninsula.

Thanks to our sincere endeavours, several rounds of the Six-Party Talks have been held to date, enabling the adoption of the Joint Statement of 19 September 2005, followed by the agreements on and implementation of phased actions aimed at resolving the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea honoured its commitments to the agreements of the Six-Party Talks in good faith. Nuclear facilities were disabled at the final stage, a nuclear declaration was submitted and those measures envisaged for the destruction phase were even implemented in advance.

That notwithstanding, the United States has laid an artificial obstacle to implementing the 3 October agreement by refusing to implement its obligations and put forward such an unjust demand as verification of an international standard never agreed on among the six parties or between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States.

The international standard asserted by the United States is nothing but the special inspection that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) called for in the 1990s to infringe upon the sovereignty of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, causing it ultimately to pull out of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The United States has now put on hold the implementation of the procedure for de-listing the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as a State sponsor of terrorism under the pretext of verification, even after having officially declared that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is not a State sponsor of terrorism. That is little short of admitting that the list is not actually related to terrorism.

As far as verification is concerned, it is a commitment to be fulfilled by the six parties during the final phase of the denuclearization of the entire Korean peninsula, in accordance with the 19 September Joint Statement. The United States insistence on unilateral inspection of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a brigand-like demand to unilaterally disarm the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the other warring party, by discarding its commitment to the

denuclearization of the entire Korean peninsula, the core of which is the removal of the United States nuclear threat, in accordance with the 19 September Joint Statement.

Now that the United States has broken the agreement, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea is inevitably taking relevant countermeasures based on the principle of action for action. If the six parties are not true to their word in carrying out their respective obligations because of their great lack of trust in one another, no progress will be made at all. That is a lesson drawn from the process of previous Six-Party Talks. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to make every sincere effort to achieve the denuclearization of the entire Korean peninsula, but we will not be indifferent to an attempt to offend our dignity and self-respect and to violate our sovereignty.

As members are well aware, inter-Korean relations have been worsening ever since the installation of the new regime in South Korea, which rejects the North-South joint declaration of 15 June 2000 and the declaration of 4 October 2007. Resolutions were adopted by consensus at previous General Assembly sessions supporting the historic North-South summits held in Pyongyang in 2000 and 2007 and the 15 June 2000 joint declaration and the 4 October 2007 declaration resulting from them. As stipulated in those resolutions, the 15 June joint declaration and programme of action and the 4 October declaration constitute major milestones that could shorten the process of improving inter-Korean relations and achieving independent national reunification in the new century, as well as a grand programme for Korean reunification that clearly reflects the demands of the times and the aspirations of the nation.

Those declarations enjoy the unanimous support not only of the entire Korean people, but also of the international community as a whole, as they are most comprehensive and realistic in their content and include all previous inter-Korean agreements, including the joint statement of 4 July 1972, which clarifies the three principles of independence, peaceful reunification and great national unity.

It is intolerable that the declarations agreed upon and adopted at the highest level in the North and the South and supported unanimously by the international community are now being disregarded simply because of the changed regime in South Korea. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will continue to seek national reconciliation and unity by fully implementing the 15 June joint declaration and the 4 October declaration, launching a new era of independent reunification, peace and prosperity and doing its utmost to ensure durable peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Salsabili (Islamic Republic of Iran): This morning, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates raised some unacceptable, futile and unfounded claims about the three Iranian islands located in the Persian Gulf, namely, Abu Musa and the two Tunbs. The Islamic Republic of Iran categorically rejects those claims and wishes to emphasize that those three islands are eternal parts of the Iranian territory and consequently are under Iranian sovereignty.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, while stressing its determination to have good and brotherly relations with its neighbour the United Arab Emirates, reiterates that all actions and measures on the Iranian island of Abu Musa have been taken in exercise of the sovereign rights of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in accordance with the arrangements emanating from the documents exchanged in 1971. The Islamic Republic of Iran stands ready to continue its bilateral talks with the relevant officials of the United Arab Emirates with a view to removing any misunderstanding that may exist in that regard.

Mr. Okuda (Japan): My delegation would like to exercise its right of reply in response to the statement made by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. That statement is entirely groundless, and we cannot accept it.

Japan has been facing up to its past with sincerity and consistency. Japan has officially expressed a sense of remorse and apology many times since the end of the Second World War. With that in mind, Japan has, for more than 60 years, consistently dedicated itself to promoting international peace and prosperity and demonstrated its respect for democracy and human

rights. Japan has adhered consistently and exclusively to a defensive security policy based on the principle that it should never become a military Power, and we have adhered to the position that international problems have to be resolved not militarily, but always peacefully.

It must be noted that Japan has sincerely addressed this issue in the past and continues to do so. It must also be noted that Japan has served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council nine times since it joined the United Nations, some 50 years ago. We are of the view that Japan has been making positive contributions to international peace and security by discharging our responsibility as a member of the Security Council.

With regard to Japan's position on Security Council reform, as we have publicly stated many times at the United Nations and in other forums, and as is well known, Japan stands ready to contribute actively and constructively to international peace and security at any time.

The fundamental policy of Japan remains unchanged. On the basis of the Pyongyang Declaration, Japan will normalize its relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea through the settlement of the unfortunate past and the comprehensive resolution of outstanding problems, including abductions and nuclear and missile issues.

Mr. Al-Barout (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor at this late hour. I would like to reply to what the representative of Iran just said. Those false claims regarding Iran's sovereignty over the three islands, Abu Musa, greater Tunb and lesser Tunb are unjust and illegal. My delegation has always held an unswerving principled position on those islands and reiterates its great disappointment at what the representative of Iran has just repeated, as his delegation does every year.

The representative of Iran cannot falsify all the demographic, political and historical truths, which show that those islands belong to the Emirates. We have never relinquished and will never relinquish our legal, historical and political right to those islands, which are an integral part of our sovereign territory and our exclusive economic zone. We repeat that that territory along with its continental shelf and airspace, is ours and cannot be divided. We categorically repudiate all the false claims and illegal measures undertaken by Iran concerning those islands. We base our position on the United Nations Charter and international law.

We repeat our appeal to the international community to urge Iran to show its peaceful good intentions in the region by entering into unconditional bilateral negotiations between our two countries regarding the occupation of the islands, or by taking the matter to the International Court of Justice to bring about a solution, as is the practice in other cases.

We reiterate that stability and economic progress in the Arabian Gulf require good-neighbourly relations in line with the principles of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their internal affairs.

Mr. Pak Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): My delegation would like me to reply to the remarks made a moment ago by the delegation of Japan. The Japanese representative's remarks attempt to divorce black from white, as if Japan were doing something to redress its past crimes.

In adopting the Pyongyang Declaration of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Japan in September 2002, both Governments agreed to redress Japan's past crimes against the Korean people during the Japanese occupation of Korea, the issue of missing Japanese and other pending matters. As part of its efforts to implement the Declaration, the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea dealt with solving that issue sincerely and with great generosity. In keeping with the Pyongyang Declaration, upon the request of the Japanese Government we made investigations into the missing persons of Japan, and we informed the Japanese Government that, of the 13 Japanese war abductees, we sent the five surviving abductees and all their children to Japan after informing the Japanese Government.

Recently, in the last month, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Japan agreed to undertake another investigation into that issue. So far, we have done everything we can, and we will do our best to solve the issue.

However, Japan has not shown any tangible willingness whatsoever to fulfil its responsibility properly to redress its past crime. Japan has refused to honestly admit to and repent of the heinous crimes it committed against humanity during the illegal military

occupation of Korea in the past and has persistently evaded responsibility for those crimes, although the old century has been replaced by a new one.

In his remarks a few minutes ago, the Japanese representative said that Japan repented sincerely, but in fact we are very concerned about the irresponsible remarks distorting the historical facts — the crimes committed by Japan. Very often, high officials of the Japanese Government distort the real facts. For example, on 4 March 2007, the then Japanese Prime Minister refused to admit Japan's responsibility for the issue of comfort women by making reckless remarks, such as that there was no evidence proving the forcible recruitment of comfort women for the imperial Japanese army. It is a historical fact that Japan forced 200,000 young Korean women into sexual slavery for its imperial army. Is there any such army in the world in the history of war that took girls and young women as their sexual slaves? It is only Japan.

On 25 March 2007, Japan's Deputy Cabinet Minister asserted that there were nurses or journalists for the Japanese army, but no comfort women, and that there were prostitutes who were sold by parents. Such irresponsible remarks come out very often. I do not want to talk any further about the crimes committed by Japan.

He mentioned the few Japanese abducted — a few more than 10 Japanese. But that is the tip of the iceberg compared to the great crime against humanity committed by Japan in the past, including the massacre of 1 million Korean people, forced labour of 8.4 million Koreans and sexual slavery of 200,000 Korean women for the Japanese army. But Japan has been evading its responsibility for the crime for more than 60 years.

For Japan to honestly settle its criminal past would be to win the trust of all the people and become a member of the international community with a clear conscience. Japan had better discard its wrong way of thinking and its stance and make a political decision to redeem its past, though belatedly.

Mr. Okuda (Japan): My delegation will again have to exercise its right of reply in response to the statement made by the representative of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Japan and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea held working level consultations in June and August 2008. At those consultations, the two sides agreed on what the aim and concrete modality of a comprehensive investigation on the abduction issue to be conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. However, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea later notified Japan that it would not conduct the investigation until it could ascertain the position of the new Administration of Japan on the agreement reached at the working consultations. Japan strongly hopes that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea will establish an investigation committee with the necessary authority and that it will commence the investigation soon.

Regarding the Japanese past, as I said earlier, Japan has been facing up to its past with sincerity and consistency. However, the numbers that the delegation of Democratic People's Republic of Korea cites as those killed and murdered are totally groundless. It is simply not possible to justify ongoing violations of human rights with such a groundless allegation.

About the comfort women, we have to say that, on that issue, the Government of Japan continues to adhere to the position expressed by Chief Cabinet Secretary Yohei Kono in his statement of 4 August 1993, in which the Government of Japan extended its "Sincere apologies and remorse".

Again, it must be noted that Japan has been seriously addressing the issue of its past history.

Mr. Pak Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): I am sorry to take the floor again. The Japanese representative has just said that the figures I gave were groundless. But Japan refuses to reveal all the facts and figures it holds in its archives. We requested, on numerous occasions, that Japan reveal all those documents. Since he said that the figure I gave is groundless, I will give the exact numbers we have got so far: 7,784,839 Koreans were drafted for forced labour without knowing their destination, and 200,000 Korean teenagers, girls and women were forced to serve the Imperial Japanese Army as comfort women.

Well, it took half a century for Japan to admit its crime in Korea. No one knows how long it will take for Japan to liquidate the crime. My delegation would like to urge Japan and to remind Japan that without thorough elimination of the past crime, a clear future for Japan cannot be expected. Whatever pretext Japan puts forward to justify its crime, the fact remains that Japan illegally drafted millions of Korean people to

forced labour as well as sexual slavery. But it still refuses to redress those crimes of the past.

The President in the Chair.

Programme of work

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/63/4, which contains the programme of work of the Assembly and the schedule of plenary meetings for the period from October to December 2008. I wish also to inform members that the lists of speakers for the items listed in document A/INF/63/4 are open.

The meeting rose at 7.35 p.m.